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ABSTRACT

Based on the policy premise that good quality preschool education is an important contribution to children's emotional, social, and intellectual progress, this book reports the findings of the Scottish Officer Educational Research Unit's research program, which looked at various aspects of preschool education in Scotland. The areas investigated include: previous research findings; staff development issues for those involved in delivering preschool education; the costs of delivering services; partnerships between local authorities and other service providers; parents'/carers' perceptions of preschool education; the preschool voucher initiative; and record keeping for preschool children. Following an introduction, "Pre-School Education: The Scottish Research Programme" (Valerie Wilson and Jane Ogden-Smith), part one of the book focuses on the issue of quality. This part contains the following chapters: (1) "Pre-school Education and Childcare in Scotland--Setting the Scene" (Ann Mooney and A.G. Munton); (2) "Tracking Children's Progress: Record Keeping in the Pre-school Years" (J. Eric Wilkinson, Joyce Watt, Angela Napuk, and Barbara Normand); (3) "Meeting Children's Education Needs: The Role of Staff and Staff Development" (Christine Stephen, Sally Brown, Peter Cope, and Steve Waterhouse); and (4) "What Do Parents Really Want from Pre-School Education?" (Christine Howe, Hugh Foot, Bill Cheyne, Melody Terras, and Catherine Rattray). Part two focuses on extending provisions and contains the following chapters: (5) "Vouchers, Parents and Providers" (Christine Stephen, Leslie Low, Sally Brown, David Bell, Peter Cope, Brian Morris, and Steve Waterhouse); (6) "Cost of Pre-School Education Provision" (Paula Gilder, Paul Jardine, and Sinead Guerin); and (7) "Changing Supply and Demand" (Edith McDowall). Part three examines ways to move forward in the provision of preschool and contains the following chapters: (8) "Review of Partnership in Pre-School Education" (Ivan Broussine); and (9) "Pre-School Education and Childcare" (Roma Menlowe and Jane Morgan). (Most articles contain references.) (SD)

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Pre-school Educational Research: Linking Policy with Practice

edited by
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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE
Education Department

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Foreword

Roma Menlowe
Scottish Executive Education Department

Education is a high priority of the Scottish Executive. It will focus on the education offered to children before they start primary school no less than on other parts of the service. The starting point for Executive policy is that effective pre-school education, based on play, helps to develop in children a real zest for learning, which will support them as they progress through all later stages of the education system. Education at this stage in children's lives is also about developing their confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance; their capacity for relationships; and their sensitivity to the world around them. The Executive recognises the contribution that good quality pre-school education can make to children's emotional and social development as well as to their intellectual progress.

Over the past three years there has been immense change in the way services are delivered, and in the expectations made of service providers. There has also been a huge expansion of the service: now over 95 per cent of eligible children in their pre-school year have access to a part-time education place. The Executive aims to extend education services to all three year olds by 2002. This will permanently extend the opportunities for young children to learn and develop. But the benefits will only be realised if growth in services is accompanied by continuous quality improvement.

Many parents of children in pre-school education (and of older children too) need access to good quality childcare as well as pre-school education. They need service provided over a full working day so that they themselves can enter or re-enter employment or training. A strategy for providing comprehensive and affordable childcare, properly co-ordinated with pre-school education, was set out in the Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland*. The Executive has endorsed this strategy and committed substantial resources towards its implementation.

To underpin these policy developments The Scottish Officer Educational Research Unit established a research programme looking at various aspects of pre-school education in Scotland, and this book reports their findings to date. The subjects covered include a review of research findings, staff development issues for those involved in delivering pre-school education, the costs of delivering services, partnerships between local authorities and other service providers, parents'/carers' perceptions of pre-school education, an evaluation of the pre-school voucher initiative, and record keeping for pre-school children. The final chapter looks at the way forward for the research programme, which has been widened to include childcare provision.

I hope this book gives you a useful insight into a fast-developing policy area and into the kinds of questions which we thought important to probe through research. We have found this an immensely fruitful and illuminating exercise. The findings have variously confirmed and challenged and invigorated our thinking; and the projects discussed in this volume have greatly enhanced the policy process. My thanks to all those researchers who have laboured in this field with us over the past three years.

Introduction

Pre-school Education: The Scottish Research Programme

Valerie Wilson and Jane Ogden-Smith

Writing about early education five years ago Joyce Watt (Watt, 1994) noted that The Scottish Office had produced its first report on pre-school education in 20 years (SOED, 1994). She detected a marked difference in the context of the early education debate at that time because for the first time in many years the expansion of nursery education had a high political profile. Quoting from the Royal Society of Arts' publication, *Start Right: The Importance of Early Learning* (Ball, 1994) she highlighted one of its more 'radical' proposals:

> *. . . the Government should immediately prepare legislation to create by 1999 statutory responsibilities for the provision of free, high quality, half-day pre-school education for all children from the age of three in an integrated context of extended day care.*
>
> **(Recommendation 12, para. 7.21)**

What a difference we see now in both research and policy in the development of the pre-school area. This collection of research papers does not attempt to chart the changes which have occurred in the intervening five years; rather it presents as a coherent whole the findings from the pre-school educational research which The Scottish Office Educational Research Unit commissioned between 1997-9 to underpin policies developed by Ministers and supported by the Pre-school Education Division. There is an opportunity now to juxtapose research and policy development in an area and at a time when policy was being developed very rapidly.

'How does educational research influence policy development?' is a question which preoccupies educational researchers. The debate was brought sharply into focus by criticisms of educational researchers from a number of sources (Hargreaves, 1996; DfEE, 1998; Hillage *et al*, 1998; Tooley, 1998). Professor David Hargreaves in an address to the Teacher Training Agency in England (Hargreaves, 1996) suggested that much educational research was 'second rate' in that it lacked impact on both policy makers and practitioners. These themes of impact and relevance were quickly taken up by other evaluators (DfEE, 1998; Hillage *et al*, 1998; Tooley, 1998). The largely negative reporting in the media associated with these reports tended to overshadow Tooley's main conclusion that almost without exception, the research reviewed was relevant to practice and/or policy. However, the exact nature of the relationship between research and policy remains elusive. Writing in a specifically Scottish context, Brown and Harlen (1998) suggest that to expect research to have a direct impact on policy making is to misunderstand the process: educational research contributes to the general climate in which policies are developed and, therefore, its influence is indirect.

This collection of summaries of research projects represents the questions for which policy makers in The Scottish Office sought answers while they were either developing new policy options for Ministerial consideration or evaluating existing policies in early education during the two years 1997-99. As such it provides a snap-shot of the relationship between the research questions pursued and subsequent policies developed. It is unique in that its contributors come from both within and outwith The Scottish Office and hopefully it will allow other researchers and practitioners some insight into the policy-making process.

In 1997 the Educational Research Unit developed a programme of pre-school educational research similar in many ways to those organised by the Economic and Social Research Council. The main objective was to commission a number of research projects in this field which would contribute collectively to the information needs of policy makers. The previous 15 years had, as Watt (1994) noted, been distinguished by a paucity of Scottish Office commissioned projects in early years' education. This position was confirmed by others. For example Nisbet (1995) identifies only five research projects in the pre-school area over the period. Significantly, Duncan (1997) was able to report that only 1 per cent of The Scottish Office Research and Intelligence Unit's (the forerunner of the Educational Research Unit) work addressed issues in early education. We are now able to claim, with some justification, that more research in pre-school education was commissioned during the past two years than the previous 15. The findings from the major projects are reported here.

Clearly some of the themes identified by Watt (1994), for example expansion of provision, quality, assessment, parental expectation, the role of the private and voluntary sectors – are still with us. But the emphasis has shifted. No longer must researchers make a case for extending pre-school education. No longer must they argue for educational provision within a coherent, integrated and comprehensive system of care for young children. No longer must they press for attention to quality as well as volume improvements in service. Many of these issues were addressed in the SOEID consultation paper – *Education in Early Childhood: The Pre-school Years*. They were given a fuller treatment in *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (Cm 3958, May 1998). That Green Paper made clear the government's commitment to extending services for young children and their families, their vision of pre-school education within a broader framework of supportive services for young children and their families, and their belief that pre-school education can contribute not only to children's education attainment and emotional development but also to wider social inclusion objectives. More recently still, the White Paper *Targeting Excellence – Modernising Scotland's Schools* (Cm 4247, January 1999) has confirmed the intention to put pre-school provision on a statutory foundation by placing local authorities under a duty to secure places for eligible children.

With devolution, the Scottish Executive has affirmed its own commitment to the childcare strategy and the expansion of pre-school education within an integrated system of supportive childcare and family services. Quality issues have also entered the national policy arena. There has been a major effort to articulate a broadly based curriculum for children aged from three to five. Building on the *Curriculum Framework* for children in their pre-school year (published in 1997), SOEID and the Scottish Consultative Council for the Curriculum (SCCC) jointly published a revised and expanded *Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5*. In emphasising the interaction between different aspects of children's learning and pointing to the crucial importance of play as the medium for learning, this *Framework* picks up on themes raised in earlier research.

The Executive is also committed to the dissemination of best practice in the early years and to the development of an integrated set of output quality standards for care and education – the latter with possibly far-reaching implications. In March, the then SOEID published a consultation paper on the regulation of pre-school education and childcare (again taking up issues raised in earlier research) with the explicit aim of developing a more consistent and equitable framework for the regulation of these services. Underpinning all the quality initiatives from central government of the past couple of years, the role of HM Inspectors of Schools – in inspecting pre-school centres across all sectors and in evaluating applications from centres seeking eligibility for grant – remains a potent instrument for the raising of standards.

These policies and initiatives have all been developed since Watt surveyed the early years. But to what extent has research influenced these developments? This is the question we explore by presenting the findings from the pre-school educational research programme.

This collection is organised into three sections. The first – *Focus on Quality* – considers research that directly affects children's progress within the pre-school playroom. Research on the influence of pre-school education on children's development, keeping track of progress, how staff conceptualise their practice and parental involvement are all explored. In the second section – *Extending Provision* – a number of 'harder' economic issues related to cost and supply-and-demand of pre-school provision are presented. This section opens up an area – the economics of education – that has largely been underdeveloped in Scottish educational research. The third section – *Ways Forward* – is inevitably more speculative. Current initiatives such as expansion through partnership are evaluated and a future research agenda outlined.

It is instructive to note the emphasis that the *Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5* (SOEID/SCCC, 1999) places on the part that parents play in their children's education. Not only does it take account of what children have already learned by the time they take up a pre-school place, but it also underlines the fact that young children learn all the time from many sources and in many situations. This is a conclusion highlighted by Anne Mooney and Tony Munton in Chapter 1 in which they provide a selective summary of published research in pre-school education and care in the United Kingdom and abroad. It exemplifies the need for clear, concise reviews of existing research which can inform the policy process. Without this wider perspective, policy makers may be in danger of commissioning research in areas which have already been well researched or neglecting significant findings from outwith Scotland. An important strand of the commissioned research programme was to identify territory which did not require reworking and to provide regular updates and briefings for the policy divisions. This is a function often neglected by educational researchers but which is crucial to the policy process. Additionally, Mooney and Munton provide the research evidence to support current policy direction: that early education and day care for young children should be planned, managed, monitored and delivered in a coherent and co-ordinated way.

How do we know that pre-school children are making progress? This is the question which Eric Wilkinson and a collaborative team of researchers from the universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities address in Chapter 2. They present the findings from a national survey of assessment and record-keeping practices in a sample of pre-school centres. Perhaps not surprisingly, the researchers discovered the variability of assessment procedures across different types of centres reflecting their disparate philosophies and attitudes towards assessment. But of greater concern, they also report the low priority accorded to informing primary schools about individual children's progress in their pre-school years. Once again this research highlights the need to manage transitions within the educational system. From a policy point of view, the research was fundamental to the development and piloting of a baseline assessment instrument and is indicative of the close relationship between research and development.

We saw in Chapter 1 that staff in different types of pre-school provision often have different values and perceptions of the curriculum and their objectives for young children. In Chapter 3, Christine Stephen and a team from Stirling University Institute of Education focus on the perceived roles, expectations and continuing professional development needs of staff from different training backgrounds who work in pre-school provision in voluntary, private and local authority sectors in

Scotland. Unlike other areas of education, pre-school education and care is often delivered by multi-disciplinary teams whose members have undertaken radically different training routes to their current posts. How do these diverse professionals think about their work and how does this differ, if at all, from the way 'experts' conceptualise pre-school education? These are questions which the research team addresses explicitly, but implicit in this chapter is a desire to understand what the researchers refer to as the 'professional craft knowledge' of the practitioners. This, they argue, should inform the development of appropriate continuing professional development for pre-school practitioners.

The findings reported by Christine Howe and a team from Strathclyde University in Chapter 4 articulate well with current policy which encourages education authorities, who carry the lead responsibility for planning and co-ordinating pre-school provision, to respond to the needs and preferences of children and their parents. And over the past two years Ministers have given authorities a strong policy steer towards working in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors wherever this would help to meet parents' and children's needs and preferences. Howe *et al* paint a picture of parents as willing partners in the process of delivering high quality pre-school provision and while most parents do not actively 'shop around' for places, the researchers discovered that they have different preferences and expectations which change as children progress from age three to five. The research also explores the complex interrelationship between parental preferences, involvement and satisfaction as separate dimensions of parental perceptions of pre-school education – an area of which both policy makers and practitioners should be aware if parental satisfaction and involvement in their children's education is to be maximised.

Although expansion of early years' education and care is now central to the Scottish Executive's policy priorities, a series of research questions surround the need to expand current provision. How does present provision meet current demand? What is the cost of providing pre-school education in rural, semi-rural and urban environments? Can the supply-side be stimulated and what were the effects of the use of pre-school vouchers? These are all questions raised in Part Two.

First an experimental scheme, based upon the use of pre-school education vouchers, is evaluated by Christine Stephen and colleagues in Chapter 5. The scheme, introduced by a previous government, aimed to expand pre-school education and encourage a variety of provision. Despite the subsequent discontinuation of the scheme, the evaluation is an example of co-operation between researchers from both education and economics departments to meet the information needs of policy makers. It addressed four major areas of concern: whether the intended expansion occurred; the attitudes of parents and pre-school providers; the impact of the initiative on particular forms of provision and the market displacement effects of the scheme. Without the co-operation of economists, it is doubtful whether the displacement and additionality aspects of the study could have been provided and it is indicative of the gaps in current research capabilities in Scotland.

Second, Paula Gilder in Chapter 6 uses her experience as a public sector accountant to open up another contentious area when she considers the range and variety of costs of providing pre-school education in different areas of Scotland. Two further projects, reported in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively, demonstrate both policy makers' needs for robust quantitative research data and also the difficulties inherent in applying financial and economic principles to the study of education. Specifically Chapter 6 poses the question: 'how much does it cost per child-place for pre-school education in different forms of provision?' This research was highly significant for two reasons. First, it provided firm financial evidence which helped Ministers reach decisions on the general level of grant for part-time pre-school places. Second, it confirmed that unit costs were generally higher in rural areas – a point reflected in the decision to issue a supplementary grant to authorities with remote rural areas and also in the decision to probe issues relating to rural provision in further research. This is currently being undertaken by a team led by Professor Shucksmith at Aberdeen University.

Third, Edith McDowall and colleagues take us further into the economics of education in Chapter 7 by pointing out that any Scottish Office attempt to stimulate the supply of pre-school education will inevitably affect the demand for places. This is a dynamic area which has been affected by funding regimes introduced by the previous government and as a consequence of the Scottish Executive's commitment to the expansion of provision. While identifying that the majority of places were provided by local authorities, the researchers point out the high dependency of some rural authorities upon voluntary and private providers and the anticipated use of these sectors to help most authorities meet the targets for provision for three year olds by 2002. The researchers conclude that the majority

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of authorities have recognised that working in partnership will provide a relatively flexible solution for future provision.

Part Three is essentially forward looking. It begins by presenting an evaluation of an on-going policy initiative – the concept of partnership between local authorities and the private and voluntary sector providers of pre-school education. In Chapter 8 Ivan Broussine explores how partnerships are working out; what the different stakeholders think; and the unexpected difficulties which have arisen in the implementation of the partnership policy. This provides feedback to policy makers as policy is implemented – thus demonstrating the involvement of educational researchers at different stages in the policy-making process.

And finally in the last chapter, Roma Menlowe and Jane Morgan, both policy makers in the Childcare Strategy Division of the Scottish Executive, outline ways forward predicated on an integrated model of education and care. We have already noted how quickly the policy agenda changes, sometimes making commissioned research redundant before it has reported. In the last few years, this inevitable disjuncture between the operating time-scales of research and policy making has been exacerbated: a new government was elected on 1 May 1997 and a Scottish Parliament established two years later. Issues which could not have been anticipated at the beginning of our research programme are now high on the policy agenda. Significantly, the Scottish Executive Education Department (replacing the old SOEID) now includes a Group entitled 'Children and Young People' which draws together staff from both education and social work areas and which has as its prime objective the development of better integrated policies and programmes spanning education, health and social services. While still recognising that pre-school education and care are not part of the compulsory school system, there is now a greater acknowledgement of the fact that society has changed. More women now work; there is a higher proportion of single-parent families and one way to redress social exclusion may be through the provision of good quality early years' care and education. All of these issues have been considered in the Childcare Strategy White Paper (1998).

In this last chapter, Roma Menlowe and Jane Morgan identify the activities to which the Scottish Executive is committed and the additional resources which will be made available. They refer briefly to a Scottish survey recently commissioned from the National Centre for Social Research, which aims to establish a baseline for the demand for childcare in Scotland. By the time it reports in early 2000, a clear picture will have emerged of both the childcare arrangements currently utilised by parents in Scotland and the factors which inform their choice. Other on-going research by Stirling University will explore the concept of all-day care, whilst good practice for very young children will be investigated by researchers at the University of London Thomas Coram Research Unit: if provision is to develop, then policy makers require exemplars of good practice.

Finally the chapter presents a possible research agenda, identified by Mooney and Munton (1999), which could inform future developments. Menlowe and Morgan argue that all policies have defined objectives and policy-related research can legitimately help them identify whether these are being met. Specifically, how is planning for provision carried out by local authorities or the private and voluntary sectors included? Who is involved in the delivery of services? What support is being provided? How are parents involved in determining what happens and how may children/families best be supported? Perhaps more problematical, they raise the issue of impact assessment in the context of multiple policy innovation: are educational researchers able to identify the effects of a policy initiative or determine its efficacy with any degree of certainty? These are questions, which although at the heart of the continuing debate on the relevance of educational research, are more than this slim volume can answer. We hope that by documenting the research commissioned by the Educational Research Unit during a period of rapid policy development, we provide some illumination on what up to now has been a disputed territory.

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Part One

Focus on Quality

Chapter One

Pre-school Education and Childcare in Scotland – Setting the Scene

Ann Mooney and A.G. Munton, Thomas Coram Research Unit

In 1998, The Scottish Office commissioned the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) to undertake a literature review of pre-school education and childcare and produce annual reports over a three-year periods briefing documents for policy makers. The following is taken from the TCRU's first interim report, and gives an overview of the current situation in pre-school education and childcare, in terms of actual provision, policy and theory. It looks at developments in pre-school education and childcare, what influences these may have on child development, the importance of quality of provision, and ends by highlighting the policy implications of current research and developments.

Developments in pre-school education and childcare

Changes in the nature of the family unit and parents' requirements are a major factor in recent developments in education and childcare. Current research shows that in the UK:

- only one in four families with dependent children now fits traditional stereotypes (father works full-time, mother stays at home to look after children)
- the number of lone-parent families has risen since 1971 from 9 per cent

to 23 per cent of all households with a dependent child

- the number of working mothers with young children has doubled since 1984
- eighty per cent of jobless mothers say they would work if childcare were available
- eight out of ten families now use some form of childcare
- existing services for under-fives are insufficient to meet demand, often unaffordable, and have developed in an unsystematic and piecemeal fashion.

Policy developments

It is obvious that growing demand must be met by providing an adequate supply of good quality, affordable pre-school childcare. *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (Cm 3958, May 1998) sets out The Scottish Office's vision for achieving this. Two major drivers of the *Strategy* are to enable:

- pre-school children to have access to ***good quality*** childcare and early education, which research has shown conclusively to be of significant benefit
- any parents (especially mothers) to take up job, education or training opportunities. Currently, many are held back by the lack of adequate childcare (i.e. provision that is free or subsidised, and local).

Furthermore, it is felt that access to good quality, affordable childcare is a vital element in local and national economic regeneration.

The Scottish Executive is providing grant funding to enable local authorities, working with partners in the voluntary and private sectors, to expand pre-school education. Already places are available for all children in the pre-school year; and the Executive is committed to extending pre-school education to all three year olds by 2002. Initiatives to support and enhance the quality of provision are also underway, including a 'best practice initiative' designed to identify and spread excellent practice in the delivery of care and education on an integrated basis. In June 1999 the *Curriculum Framework for Children 3 – 5* was published, setting out a broad range of learning experiences designed to support young children's social and emotional development as well as their intellectual progress.

It has also stipulated that Childcare Partnerships should be formed in each local authority area. These draw on the expertise and knowledge of several key groups, including local authorities, private and voluntary childcare providers, parents, trainers and educators, and employers. Their aim is that early education and day care for young children be planned together. Do research findings support those policy developments? It is to this question that we now turn.

The psychology of child development, parenting and childcare

Arguments about the psychology of child development, parenting and childcare continue, and centre mainly on the development of emotional bonds between mothers and their children. One school of thought (e.g. Leach, 1995; Morgan, 1996) holds that parents, and in particular mothers, must provide full-time childcare for their children, at least until they reach school age. This position has held sway for many years, affecting policy and practice, and inducing guilt amongst parents who choose to use alternative care when their children are young. It is rooted in 'attachment' theory (Bowlby, 1951; Ainsworth, 1962), which stemmed from Bowlby's studies of children in institutional care. He observed that children who experienced prolonged separations from their mothers in their first few years of life were likely to be socially and emotionally damaged, and concluded that successful social and emotional development depended upon children developing a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with their primary caregiver.

In a review Rutter (1995) concluded that although empirical evidence supported most key features of attachment theory, some areas needed revision. Young children do need to develop lasting, warm, affectionate and responsive relationships, but healthy development does not depend entirely on children becoming attached only to their mothers – the formation of multiple, simultaneous attachments is quite normal for children (Dunn, 1983). As Rutter explains:

> *Children can cope well with several adults caring for them, provided it is the same adults over time and provided that the individuals with whom they have secure relationships are available at times when they are tired, distressed or facing challenging circumstances.*
>
> **Rutter, 1995, p.562**

23

With pre-school education and childcare provision, research evidence shows that it is not separation itself that may affect children, but separation in association with other adverse factors, for example an unfamiliar environment, unfamiliar people, inconsistent care and care that lacks sensitivity, warmth and affection.

Rutter points out:

> [T]*here is a world of difference between institutional care without any parental involvement and day care in which the mother remains a key figure who continues to actively participate in looking after the child. For these reasons, little weight can be attached to the results of residential group care as a basis for assessing the probable sequelae of group day care.*
>
> **Rutter, 1981, p.154**

The desirable balance between education and care

Debates about the desirable balance between education and care in the pre-school years are not new, but recently people have begun to question whether it is possible, or even desirable, to distinguish between the two. The idea that care and education are different, has arisen in part from attitudes towards state involvement in the lives of families and children. For at least the last hundred years in Western societies, education has been perceived as a social responsibility – society has a duty to ensure that children receive an adequate education. Care, however, is something that has remained the private responsibility of families – the state has only intervened where family care was adjudged inadequate. From this a dichotomy has arisen – education being defined as primarily concerned with the intellectual needs of children, and care being associated with their physical and emotional needs. This effect is arguably less pronounced in Scotland given the curricular advice mentioned earlier; but, even so, two distinct legislations have developed, one regulating care and the other education, resulting, in turn, in a number of disparities between pre-school education and childcare, for example:

- public funding for pre-school education has far outstripped that for childcare

- training, and thus the professional status, of care workers has fallen well short of that enjoyed by nursery teachers (but this is an area which is currently being addressed and policy developments will rely on information gathered from the Workforce Surveys). It should be noted that nursery nurses suffer a similar lack of status
- providers of early childhood services are subject to two different inspection regimes (though this too is now being addressed).

Following a survey of nursery schools in Scotland, Hartley (1993) concluded that:

> *. . . pre-school education in Scotland lacks organisational elegance. It is a mess, with a diversity of provision and institutional labels. It is ripe for rationalisation . . .*
>
> p.147

How children learn and its implications for pre-school education and childcare

In recent years there has been a shift away from the once popular idea that children's thinking ability develops with age. Now many developmental psychologists feel that thinking, and learning, develop through language and communication. Because words represent ideas, children learn ideas by first learning words – language is the key to learning. Effective adult communication with children has been described as 'scaffolding' (Bruner, 1985) – it gives children guidance and interactional support that takes account of their abilities to develop new skills. This counteracts the notion that effective education cannot start until children are four or five – education should no longer be defined in terms of formal academic teaching, but in terms of sensitive, responsive adult communication that serves to stimulate learning. Education begins at birth. This movement in developmental psychology makes the artificial divide between pre-school education and childcare largely redundant. A caring environment in which children feel safe and secure is a prerequisite for effective learning. Once children feel safe and secure anywhere, they will begin to feel sufficiently confident to stretch their abilities.

Does pre-school education and childcare influence child development?

Compensatory programmes

There is little current UK research in this area. However, American research (Lazar and Darlington, 1982) suggests that compensatory pre-school education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds has positive effects on school success in later life. Disadvantaged children with pre-school experience were less likely to have been placed in special education, less likely to have been held back a grade and more likely to have graduated from high school. Compensatory pre-school programmes can also produce short-term IQ gains. Research by Campbell and Ramey (1994) shows that scores for both cognitive and academic measures were higher for those children who had received the longest period of intervention. Schweinhart and Weikart (1980) found that pre-school education had positive effects on academic achievement, employment, earnings and social behaviour. In a cost-benefit analysis, the return to tax payers was estimated at seven dollars for every dollar invested in pre-school (Barnett, 1996), most benefits coming from reductions in crime.

The effects of pre-school experiences on all children

The positive effects of pre-school programmes are not limited to disadvantaged children. One study of 9,000 children found that all who attended some form of pre-school provision had better cognitive skills, were more successful at school and had fewer behavioural problems than those who did not (Osborn and Millbank, 1987). Other studies have established that children with more pre-school experience benefit most, and that the longer children experience an early childhood service the better are their motor and early mathematical skills (Wylie *et al.*, 1996).

Further evidence of the effects of day care

American research evidence drawn from studying a sample of 1,300 children from birth to seven years of age (NICHD Early Childcare Network, 1994) suggested that there were significant differences in language and cognitive development between children receiving good quality childcare and those in poor quality childcare. Children with responsive and sensitive caregivers who talked more to them did better in assessments of cognitive and language development throughout their first three years. Family characteristics are more influential on children's social competence than childcare provision. However, childcare quality was related to better social competence and co-operation and less problem behaviour. The longer children spent with other children the more likely they were to be co-operative and less likely to have problem behaviours (Vandell, 1999).

Pre-school experience and academic attainment

Evidence from research carried out in England suggests a positive association between pre-school experience and academic performance. In a small study of 834 children, pupils with experience of pre-school education scored higher on maths and reading tests in Key Stage 1 National Curriculum tests in 1995 than those who had had none (Schagen and Sainsbury, 1996). There is currently no UK research to provide insight into how childcare and pre-school histories affect children's progress at school but research projects now underway may go some way to addressing this question.

How does pre-school education and childcare influence child development?

Changed attitudes among children, teachers and parents

Attending pre-school provision may cause a change in the attitudes and perceptions of children, parents and teachers, which in turn leads to better outcomes. Sylva and Wilshire write:

> *The most important impact of early education appears to be children's aspirations, motivations and school commitment. These are moulded through experiences in the pre-school classroom which enable children to enter school with a positive outlook and begin a school career of commitment and social responsibility.*
>
> **Sylva and Wilshire, 1993, p.32**

Myers (1992) suggested that initial IQ gains resulting from pre-school attendance gave parents and teachers a different view of the child's ability that helped to raise children's self-esteem. A study in Belgium (cited in EC, 1995) showed how children's attitudes can affect teachers' perceptions – teachers' assessments of pupils depended as much on the pupil's attitude and behaviour (particularly participation in class) as on academic ability.

Parental involvement

Evidence from several different sources suggests that parental involvement is highly influential in pre-school settings (and Howe *et al.*, Chapter 4, provide insights into Scottish parents' attitudes to involvement in pre-school education.) The Consortium of Longitudinal Studies' evaluation of compensatory education in the U.S.A. concluded that home visits and parental involvement produced better results. Osborn and Millbank (1987) found that academic attainment in primary school was significantly associated with socio-economic status, although other social and family characteristics were also in play, of which parental interest in the child's development was one of the most important.

Length of time in pre-school or childcare setting

Pre-school education in the UK is usually provided on a part-time basis for approximately 12.5 hours per week during term-time only. Many other European countries provide full-time pre-school services, blending childcare and education. By contrast, in the UK, there still often seems to be a separation between pre-school education and childcare, with many more people using full-time childcare than full-time pre-school education. American research suggests that children who attended full-day kindergarten were less likely to be held back a grade or to be identified as having special educational needs than those who only attended for half-days. It has often been claimed that it is not good for children to spend many hours in day-care centres but this claim is not supported by research. No studies have found an optimal amount of time for children to be away from their parents, and time spent in good quality non-parental care has no significant detrimental impact on cognitive or language development.

Curriculum and type of provision

Children may do better when the curriculum is child-led – research evidence suggests that children fare best in pre-school settings where adults treat children as active learners and arrange their classrooms and activities so that children can plan, do and review their own activities. In this model, teachers play a supportive role, facilitating children's intellectual, social and physical experiences. As is argued in *The Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5* (SOEID, 1999) '. . . the curriculum refers to a framework of planned learning experiences based on different aspects of children's development and learning . . .' (P5). But evidence from English research suggests that staff in childcare and education settings have different values and priorities for the curriculum they offer young children. Teachers working in nursery schools and classes said that their main aim was to promote children's learning. Day-nursery staff said that they had many different aims including caring for children, promoting children's development and supporting parents. Whereas teachers saw the curriculum as central to their work, staff in day nurseries saw it as more peripheral. Workers in different types of provision often had very different values and perceptions of the curriculum and their objectives for young children (and Stephen *et al.* report evidence in Chapter 3). Type of pre-school setting can also have an effect on the outcomes. Jowett and Sylva (1986) found that children who attended nursery classes were more oriented to learning, as characterised by their classroom behaviour, than their peers who attended playgroups – compared with playgroup children, nursery children chose more educational activities, initiated more learning-oriented contacts with the teacher and were more persistent and independent when they encountered obstacles. The researchers concluded pre-school experiences affect the ease with which children begin their school careers.

The importance of quality in pre-school education and childcare services

Quality in pre-school education and childcare can be gauged in a number of ways. We have chosen to look at the following major indicators of quality:

- adult:child ratios and groups size
- caregiver training and education
- working conditions for staff
- physical environment
- suitability and continuity of care
- differential access to quality childcare.

Adult:child ratios and group size

Several studies have demonstrated the impact of adult:child ratio and group size on quality of care provision. Lower ratios and smaller groups have been reliably associated with enhanced language development, less aimlessness and aggression, more developmentally appropriate activities and greater social competence (Ruopp *et al.*, 1979; Howes *et al.*, 1992). One study concluded:

> *. . . ratio predicted the quality of the caregiver-child interaction. Only where caregivers were not stressed by being responsible for large numbers of children were they able to provide valuable social interactions . . .*
>
> **Howes and Rubenstien, 1985**

High adult:child ratios and large groups are associated with less sensitive and responsive caregiver behaviour and more restrictiveness and harshness (Jacobsen and Owen, 1987; Howes and Rubenstein, 1985). Children in poor quality provision are more likely to be involved in potentially dangerous incidents, be more apathetic, more restricted and less sociable (Ruopp *et al.*, 1979; Howes and Rubenstein, 1985).

Children spend more time playing with their peers in classes with better ratios (Holloway and Reichart-Erickson, 1988) but some studies indicate that group size, rather than ratios, was the most important predictor of children's experience. In the UK the recommended adult:child ratio in group day care settings is 1:8. Nevertheless, children in a group of 24 looked after by three adults may receive less individual attention than children in a group of eight looked after by one adult. Identical adult:child ratios can provide children with very different experiences depending on group size. However, high ratios and large groups are not always associated with poor outcomes – other important factors, such as staff training and explicit childcare objectives play a key role.

Caregiver education and training

There seems to be a strong association between the education, training and experience of providers, caregiver- and child-behaviour, and developmental outcomes. For example, trained caregivers are more likely to respond positively to children in their care, and to provide developmentally appropriate activities. Three key findings emerge from research:

- specialised training at the post-secondary school level is more likely to be a better preparation for childcare staff than training at the vocational or school level

- staff working with infants and or school-aged children appear to need specific training related to these age groups
- the most appropriate training for staff working with pre-school children may be a degree or specialised childcare course.

Working conditions for staff

Research conducted in the United States suggests that working conditions, particularly salaries and job satisfaction, have a significant impact on adult-child interactions and children's development. In addition, paid preparation time and reduced-fee childcare for staff predicted job satisfaction. Regular staff meetings, breaks away from the children, lower adult:child ratios and opportunities to influence policy and programme development were also factors contributing to job satisfaction. High levels of job dissatisfaction and staff turnover are more likely in centres offering lower salaries and/or unfavourable adult:child ratios (Whitebrook *et al.*, 1990).

Physical environment

Several studies have found an association between aspects of the physical environment and either developmental outcomes or caregiver behaviour. The behaviour of children and caregivers is more constructive in settings with clearly defined, well-organised spaces. Positive features of childcare environments include the following (Moore, 1986):

- clear boundaries and separation of activity areas
- sufficient space for activities
- sufficient storage, work and display space
- materials stored to allow free access for children.

Good quality care across a range of settings is clearly associated with safety, and the effective organisation of age-appropriate materials (NICHD Early Childcare Research Network, 1996).

Stability and continuity of care

Evidence from America suggests that greater stability of care predicts better adjustment of children to school in the first year. Teachers rate children with more stable childcare histories more highly on academic skills. Children in centres with high staff turnover are more aimless, less sociable with peers and adults, and have poorer language and cognitive development (Whitebrook *et al.*, 1990).

No recent research has been conducted in the UK into the impact of multiple care arrangements, but American research suggests that these have a negative impact on child development. Research recently commissioned by The Scottish Office should provide insights into how young children cope with the transitions both within and across care providers.

Differential access to quality childcare

Ironically, there is some evidence to suggest that those children in most need of good quality pre-school education and care have least access to it. A range of studies carried out in the United States and Canada indicate that children from more advantaged backgrounds tend to be in higher quality care. Children from families with scarce resources (e.g. single mothers, lower levels of parental education, lower income and occupational status) were disproportionately represented in low quality childcare (Goelman and Pence, 1987).

Policy implications

The Scottish Office/Scottish Executive has made an explicit commitment to expand and integrate good quality, affordable services for young children (*Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland*, Cm 3958, May 1998). New initiatives are being funded to provide new early years' places. Policy makers do of course support parents who choose not to work while they have young children. However, failure to expand early childhood services cannot be justified on grounds that it may damage family relationships. What factors should policy makers take into account as they develop further initiatives in pre-school education and childcare?

Our research has led us to believe that:

- clear distinctions between education and care provision are no longer tenable. Early years' services should seek to integrate both care and educational aspects of provision
- the potential benefits of early years' provision are greatest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Policy makers need to look at ways in

which the children of hard-to-reach groups, such as travellers, ethnic minorities and the economically and socially deprived, can share early years' service provision

- children who have good quality early pre-school experiences do better when it comes to later academic achievement. Developing pre-school services for all young children is, quite rightly, a priority for the Scottish Executive
- the quality of early years' services is very important. Policy makers need to consider ways in which the quality of new provision can be assured, and how existing providers can be encouraged to raise standards
- effectiveness of pre-school provision is most often assessed on the basis of academic test results. Innovative approaches to defining effectiveness in this context are required
- parental involvement in early years' services can have positive effects on outcomes for children. Providers should look at ways in which parents might be actively encouraged to become more involved in the early education of their young children. The promotion of specific home-school policies, outreach work and other similar schemes could not only enhance child outcomes, but also make the transition to school much easier
- the amount of time children spend in early years' services may be critical. This finding may have implications for the current policy of expanding free nursery provision on only a part-time basis
- proposed changes in the early years' curriculum, including the extension of the Curriculum Framework to three to five year olds, should be monitored carefully as they are implemented. Monitoring should look not only at the impact on children, but also consider how providers in different early sectors view and implement the changes
- the quality of pre-school services has been linked with staff training. As new, integrated services are developed, the training needs of staff should be paramount
- working conditions of those employed in early years' services need to be monitored. Pay and conditions of employment have an important and direct impact on the quality of care children receive.

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Part One

Focus on Quality

Chapter Two

Tracking Children's Progress: Record Keeping in the Pre-school Year

J Eric Wilkinson, Joyce Watt, Angela Napuk and Barbara Normand

How do we know that children are making progress in pre-school education? This is the question which underpins the research reported in this chapter. During 1998 the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department collaborated with a number of academics and practitioners on a project concerned with baseline assessment in Scotland. As part of the work, a national survey was commissioned to identify current assessment and record-keeping practices in a representative sample of all pre-school centres. A strong message from the pre-school survey was the variability in assessment practices between different types of centre – a substantial proportion of centres did not maintain records on children's progress. It was also discovered that staff in pre-schools gave little priority to informing their colleagues in primary schools about individual children.

In the late 1990s assessment and record keeping in early childhood education operate in a dramatically changed educational and political context. Five specific features can be identified in this changed context:

- an acknowledgement of the early years as being fundamental to later educational achievement
- the availability of provision for all four year olds, and the promise of places for three year olds, as required

- the publication of national curricular guidelines for three to five year old children in their pre-school year (SOEID, 1999)
- the publication of a national childcare strategy for Scotland (Cm 3958, 1998)
- the introduction in England and Wales of mandatory assessment for all children starting primary school.

It is now also widely accepted that assessment is an essential feature of sound educational practice. In early childhood education the emphasis of any assessment framework is likely to be on child development criteria such as general cognitive, social and physical development. Some schemes, however, focus on progress in basic educational skills, particularly numeracy and literacy, while in others, each area of national curriculum guidelines is covered. Views about the structure of the curriculum will inevitably affect the content of any assessment scheme. Where the balance of the curriculum is weighted towards basic core skills, the assessment will be similarly aligned. If, however, the curriculum is broad-based it is important to assess children's progress against a similarly broad range of criteria. If the assessment is based on limited criteria the balance in the curriculum delivered will also tend to be influenced by those criteria that are used.

However, considerable concern has been expressed about the purpose and practice of assessing very young children. In an English context, one researcher has warned that:

> *Early years educators need to treat the issue of assessment very carefully. We need to be clear about which purposes of assessment we are working towards, and which models of the early years curriculum and of children's learning underpin our models of assessment. We cannot uncritically adopt a model handed down from the National Curriculum and assessment procedures*
>
> **Burgess-Macey, 1994, p. 48**

Interestingly our knowledge of how pre-school children are assessed in Scotland is somewhat limited. It is therefore important to establish this picture of the current assessment practices across all pre-school sectors in Scotland and identify key issues. To this end, in 1997 a sample, based on all sectors of pre-school education and all 32 new local authorities, was drawn up. Pre-school groups were classified as:

- local authority nursery schools and classes
- local authority day nurseries/family centres
- community nurseries
- voluntary sector playgroups
- private nurseries
- independent schools' nurseries.

A 25 per cent quota sample (880 groups) was then identified.

Questionnaires were sent out in spring 1997 with two main aims: to gain basic information on centres and their assessment/record-keeping practices; and to assess the views of pre-school staff on the relative importance of different purposes of assessment and record keeping. The response rate was 57 per cent (501 returns) although this varied greatly between sectors – nursery school classes (70 per cent), independent nurseries (59 per cent), day nurseries (68 per cent).

Interviews also took place in nine centres representative of the pre-school field as a whole but selected on the basis of their clear involvement in assessment and record keeping. This gave some insight into the particular schemes in use and some reactions to the issues which emerged from the survey.

Summary of the main findings

Nearly one third of centres, most commonly playgroups, did not maintain any written record of children's progress. Practice among the 66 per cent who did keep records varied widely. The importance of record keeping was generally accepted.

Where records were kept, language (65.8 per cent), social/personal development (65.2 per cent) and physical/motor development (58.2 per cent) were most frequently noted.

Most assessment was done by observation and recorded using *ad hoc* instruments for both formative and summative purposes. Practitioners want assessment strategies to be a reflection of their child-centred philosophy and based on the ongoing work of the group.

Almost all centres shared the record with parents, but two thirds (68.5 per cent) of centres claimed ownership. A few invited parents to contribute.

Nearly two thirds held meetings with their primary school but less than half transferred a written record; and a high proportion regarded passing on information to the primary school as one of the least important functions of pre-school record keeping. Links between pre-school groups and primary schools are patchy and variable. The purposes of record keeping were seen largely in terms of learning and teaching. Low priority was given to quality assurance and accountability as well as to pre-school/primary liaison.

Issues

Do pre-school groups see record keeping as important?

Most pre-school groups, certainly in the public and private sectors, see assessment and record keeping as important as long as they are based on children's learning needs, are handled sensitively and take a positive approach. They also have an important function for staff and parents. The voluntary sector is more anxious, fearing that written records may be incompatible with playgroup philosophy. Overall, some regret the absence of guidance and look for help and support and others are pleased to pursue their own *ad hoc* schemes, which they feel suit their children and themselves.

Will an increased emphasis on assessment and record keeping compromise the nature of pre-school education?

Again, the voluntary sector is most likely to see this as a threat but others claim that assessment and record keeping are already there and are helpful if implemented sensitively and within a curriculum framework that is based on the learning needs of children. Many, however, are slightly anxious that pre-school education, with its increasing emphasis on assessment and planning, seems to be growing more adult centred, puts more pressure on staff, and reduces their time for core work with children.

Opportunities and problems of linking pre-school records to primary education

Practices and attitudes vary widely but overall practical links are very common. However, there is also evidence to suggest that there are more often tensions surrounding the handing on of formal records from one stage to the next.

First, there is a common perception among pre-school staff that many primary staff are not interested in pre-school records except in relation to children with problems because primary staff want to make their own assessments. Some pre-school staff feel strongly that primary staff have unrealistically low expectations and children often work at levels far below their potential.

Some, however, see merit in the 'clean sheet' syndrome of the primary school, which may avoid the danger of premature 'labelling' and some in the voluntary sector maintain that parents do not want a formal record to go with the child to the primary school. A few, particularly in the voluntary and independent sectors, feel that their competence to observe and assess children in ways which might be helpful to the primary school is in doubt.

Second, there is some frustration that, even where links between pre-school groups and primary schools are good, the initiative for the links almost always comes from the pre-school and even then are low in the primary school's priorities. Pre-school staff had themselves, of course, seen linking with primary schools as one of the least important purposes for their own assessment practices.

Third, pre-school staff acknowledge the major practical difficulties for primary schools: they often serve a large number of pre-school groups, only some of which will have kept formal records, and there is unlikely to be much commonality of style. Given this context, some pre-school groups see the pre-school record as the property of the parent which s/he may or may not pass on to the primary school, and this compounds the problem. The whole process is easiest in the nursery class which is an integral part of a primary school.

Parents and record keeping

The great majority of staff in those pre-schools sampled share their records with parents either through written reports or meetings or both. Some involve parents themselves in the assessment of their own children and encourage them to make contributions to written records, although this is a practice which can bring its own problems. Finally, there is a small but significant trend to see ownership of the pre-school record as lying with the parents. Interestingly, many parents do not hand the report on to the primary school. The role of parents in assessment and record keeping is critical, both in terms of their rights as parents and the importance of their contribution.

Training and support

Despite the widespread acceptance of the importance of assessment and record keeping, many staff, particularly in the voluntary sector, need training and support.

The role of pre-school education

Assessment and record keeping epitomise a tension which lies at the heart of pre-school education as it tries to reconcile its belief in itself as a distinctive and critical educational stage in its own right with its role as the first formal stage of an educational service. As the former it needs to establish its own philosophy and practice, and as the latter it has to 'link with' if not 'prepare for' the subsequent stages of learning. It is a tension which needs to be recognised and resolved not only because two years of part-time pre-school education will soon become the right of every child in Scotland, but also because patterns of baseline assessment which straddle the pre-school year and the first year of the primary school may be implemented.

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Part One

Focus on Quality

Chapter Three

Meeting Children's Education Needs: The Role of Staff and Staff Development

Christine Stephen, Sally Brown, Peter Cope and Steve Waterhouse

We have seen from Chapter 1 that staff in different types of pre-school provision often have different values and perceptions of the curriculum and their objectives for young children. In this chapter, the team from Stirling University present the findings from a study of staff working within the pre-school sector in Scotland. In 1997 SOEID commissioned a study of the perceived roles, expectations and continuing-professional-development needs of staff from different training backgrounds working in pre-school provision in the voluntary, private and local authority sectors.

Pre-school practitioners work in an environment characterised by the need to meet the always immediate and often conflicting demands of individuals and groups of young children. Pre-school children need a mix of care and support for learning. A number of different learning experiences will probably be happening simultaneously in the playroom and during the course of a two- or three-hour session there will be several changes of activity or play for each child.

Describing the role of the adult in this environment can be approached in a variety of ways. From an 'outside' perspective, activity may be described in a list of tasks, areas of activity or formal statements of intent set out in an aspirational document without reference to any specific context. This external, generalised description of how things ought to be in pre-school provision does not necessarily coincide with the 'inside' perspective of the practitioner focusing on how things are in their particular setting. While practitioners and outsiders (e.g. advisors, trainers or policy makers) may agree on aspirations for practice and express them in a generalised framework which makes no reference to particular circumstances, this often fails to understand and indeed sometimes misunderstands the salient features of the 'insider's' construction of playroom events and actions in their context. Practitioners may adopt the language of the outside perspective as the occasion demands, but it cannot be assumed that this is how they make sense of what they do while actually engaged in the playroom.

A generalised context-free approach is traditionally adopted for training of pre-school practitioners, including in-service training. If training is to help in incorporating 'outside' or context-free notions of 'best practice' into everyday practice then it must be offered in a way which fits with practitioners' own ways of making sense of what they do. It is essential that a staff development programme should start from where practitioners are in their practice and thinking.

This research adopted a twin-stranded approach, setting out to develop both an 'inside' expression of the situated understanding and thinking of practitioners and a context-free 'outside' framework, setting out the prescribed roles of pre-school practitioners. Within each strand attention was paid to differences and similarities in the perspectives of staff occupying different roles and with different training backgrounds. Ideas for in-service training strategies were developed, drawing on both strands of the research.

The research process

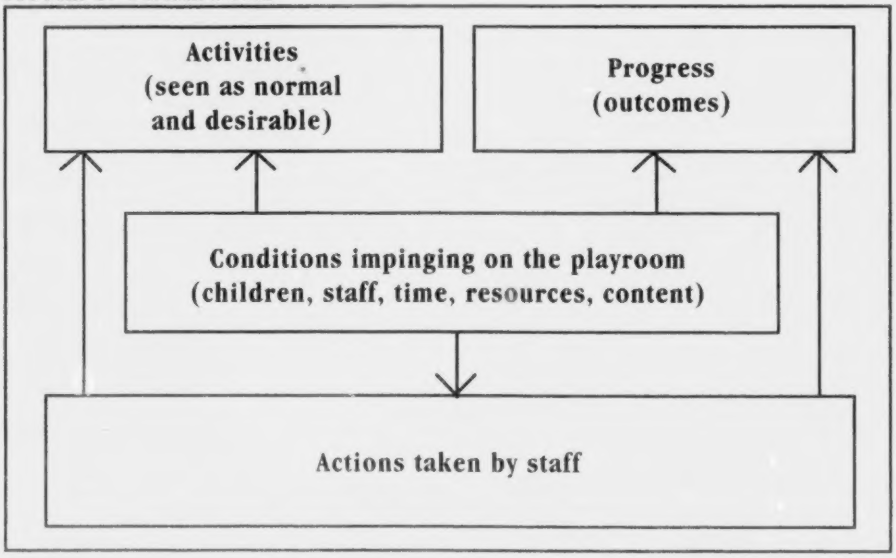
A framework of concepts to reflect the situated or insider perspectives of practitioners (their own understanding of their work in its setting, their professional craft knowledge) was constructed from 63 interviews with individuals working in 15 different pre-school settings. The settings were typical of the range of provision and included staff with a wide range of backgrounds. Staff were interviewed immediately after observation of a period of activity in the playroom (playroom is used to describe any context in which staff are interacting with children, indoors or out-of-doors). The interview technique focused on the way in which staff made sense of the observed events and avoided generalised responses or the introduction of ideas by the researcher. The approach and the analytical framework used drew upon previous work by Brown and McIntyre, 1993.

The second research strand involved the development of the *Framework for Good Practice* (the generalised 'outside' perspective). This was compiled initially from published guidelines and research evidence and was grounded in practice through consultation with a group of experienced assessors of pre-school provision (managers and trainers). A subsequent process of observation sought to explore the usefulness of the *Framework* as a tool with which to observe and describe good practice in a variety of settings. Eight playrooms were observed using the *Framework for Good Practice*. Each of these settings had been nominated as one in which 'good practice' could be observed. The nurseries covered the range of pre-school provision offered in the local authority sector by education and social work departments, the private and voluntary sectors. As well as observing practice using the *Framework*, the head or manager of each setting and up to four other staff were interviewed to gather their response to the *Framework*.

The analysis of both strands included an examination of the responses of staff with different backgrounds and potentially different roles.

How pre-school staff think about their work

FIGURE 1: FRAMEWORK


Activities (seen as normal and desirable)
Progress (outcomes)
Conditions impinging on the playroom (children, staff, time, resources, content)
Actions taken by staff

Analysis of the interviews in which pre-school practitioners talked about their work in the observed session led to the development of a framework which reflects the way in which the practitioners made sense of their playroom practice (Figure 1). Four main elements of this framework were apparent.

Progress

Staff made statements about children's achievements, improvement and development but in only a very few cases were these described by staff as goals or even intentions and never as 'targets'. Much more often progress was noted with pleasure, and sometimes surprise, and expressed as observations of new behaviour or unexpected achievements which children displayed in the playroom. Staff were much more likely to talk about reacting to indications of progress in children's behaviour rather than to report on progress with regard to objectives or plans. Talking about progress was much less pervasive than talk about establishing and maintaining the activities which staff saw as normal and desirable in the playroom. In forward planning, activities may be chosen to promote particular kinds

FIGURE 2: EXAMPLES OF PROGRESS TALKED ABOUT BY PRACTITIONERS

Progress	Frequency reported	Examples
Cognitive and language	High	they remembered what they were supposed to be doing and acted it out NN making the connection between the mouse and what was happening on the screen T
Social skills	Medium	she's good at taking turns PL he was able to tell us he's not happy with someone rather than skelping them T
Skills and artifacts	Medium	he managed to do a jigsaw T managed to make an engine from clay NN
Readiness for learning	Low	his confidence has grown, he's prepared to ask questions NN for him to stay there for a good ten minutes was something new T
Life skills	Low	they're now able to spread their own snacks NN they get themselves changed for gym PL

NN: nursery nurse PL: play leader T: teacher of progress but this did not appear to reflect staff's thinking when they were in the playroom. Figure 2 illustrates the kinds of progress talked about by practitioners, arranged in order of the frequency with which each category occurred in the interviews.

There was evidence of some differences between practitioners in the kinds of progress which they emphasised. Teachers placed more emphasis on progress made by children in developing readiness to learn. Play leaders, on the other hand, commented less than others on cognitive and language development, and the development of skills and making artifacts. Nursery nurses referred to life skills much more often than the other practitioners and less often to social skills.

Activities

Very considerable attention was given to the patterns of activities which staff sought to maintain in the playroom. They were mentioned much more frequently than the various kinds of progress and the heavy emphasis on progress, outcomes and learning objectives, which is commonplace elsewhere in educational prescriptions, was not found among pre-school practitioners. While patterns of activities were sometimes regarded as appropriate pathways to progress, they were more commonly seen as ends in themselves. Indeed, in some cases it was explained that progress had to be made before a child could participate in the activities, reversing the traditionally assumed sequence of activity leading to progress.

The activities and experiences which staff talked about represented what they saw as normal and desirable states of activity in the playroom. The maintenance of these desirable states was a crucial factor in staff judgments that things had gone well in a particular session. The 12 categories of activities and experiences identified from the interview data are listed in Figure 3 (below). There were few differences in the emphasis placed by teachers, play leaders or nursery nurses on the various categories. However, teachers appeared to place greater emphasis on activities which create conditions for learning and children being interested, while play leaders were less concerned than other staff with cognitive activities. Nursery nurses put greater stress on routine life-skills practice.

Conditions impinging on the playroom

The ways in which staff made sense of their work were highly context dependent.

In particular, they referred to the characteristics of the children and other phenomena which impinged on the playroom. The interviews with staff indicated that they considered these conditions crucial in their attempts to maintain activities they saw as normal and desirable in the playroom. Unless account is taken of

FIGURE 3: CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY PRACTITIONERS

Activities	**Frequency reported**	**Examples**
Manipulation	High	cutting egg boxes to put the glitter on NN sitting working with the clay T
Talking and listening	High	talking about what they were doing and interspersing it with bits of news PL listening patiently at story time T
Cognitive	Medium	measuring it as they went along PL matching the big character to the big shoe, small to small T
Taking initiative	Medium	they chose the equipment they wanted to work with NN the one who was taking on telling them what they were going to be and do T
Socialising	Medium	mixing well together, encouraging each other NN they waited taking turns PL
Routine skills	Medium	bringing their cards to registration NN getting their jackets on & talking about taking umbrellas PL
Role play	Medium	she was pretending to be a teacher NN there were the boys, getting dressed up as three kings T
Affective	Medium	happy playing with the trains PL quite happy for me to go and sit with them, didn't make them feel shy T
Learning conditions	Medium	they were prepared to put their hands up NN all busy, nobody wandering around with nothing to do T
Physical	Low	throwing rugs and bean bags PL we did a bit more dancing T
Singing	Low	they did songs and musical instruments NN

FIGURE 4: CONDITIONS FOR ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY PRACITIONERS

Conditions	**Frequency reported**	**Examples**
Children		
Resists/ encourages activity	High	the children are really interested in what someone else has brought in PL she was reluctant to change from construction to painting T
Disruption/ order	High	a bit of a performance at circle time, but then he sat down and hasn't moved PL he's prone to throwing himself down & having a tantrum T
Individual characteristics	High	she needs adult company and often needs a cuddle PL she asks for her Mum at 11 o'clock each morning T
Pre-requisites	Medium	he has a problem about colours which complicates him making judgments about size NN the Chinese boy has very little English T
Group composition	Medium	you need to have those with a speech problem in the smaller group NN fewer children means not the same feeling of overcrowding, able to choose better, more relaxed T
Willingness to engage	Low	they're ready and able to go in, tip out the box of whatever and get on with it NN she finds it difficult to concentrate or sit all day T
Age	Low	the younger children are very noisy and just run around NN if there are bigger ones there is a bit of jostling and the bigger ones shove while the wee ones cry PL
Home influence	Low	he's babied at home and won't accept nursery discipline PL he had a fall out with his mum this morning before he came in T
Time		
Time of day/ week/year	Medium	Mondays the children are desperate to tell you what they've done at the weekend, they're always a bit hectic NN in the afternoon I'm constantly more up and down with more younger children T
Time taken	Low	we started earlier so it wasn't as rushed as last year NN the time was taken up by those parents who wanted to be shown round and by the student who wanted to ask me things T
Staff/ other adults	Medium	if there are too many students it means the staff have to watch them more than the children NN when the person at the sand goes for tea, I have to look after the whole room T
Content	Medium	it was something they hadn't tried before so it was interesting for them PL road safety is good because we can see the cars coming out between the garage and the school T
Resources	Low	we were helped by a new piece of equipment, a magnetic nursery rhyme board NN
Continuity	Low	the activity was painting, so we integrated the dentist into that, she was coming that day T

these conditions there is little possibility of either explaining or justifying what is going on. It is the concern with these conditions which most importantly distinguishes the practitioners' accounts (their situated perspective) from an 'outside' or 'expert' framework for provision. The categories of conditions which emerged from staff interviews are summarised in Figure 4 .

There was a wide range of conditions and a large number of statements about different conditions which impinged on the playroom yet relatively few differences among staff with different backgrounds. Teachers did place more emphasis than others on the limitations imposed by time, the impact of staff or other adults and the importance of continuity. Play leaders, however, were more concerned than others about disruptive behaviour and engaging children in activities. They were less concerned with any of the time issues. Nursery nurses placed less emphasis than either of the other two groups of practitioners on individual children's characteristics or home influences.

FIGURE 5: STAFF ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY PRACTITIONERS

Staff Actions	**Frequency reported**	**Examples**
Supporting activities	High	I started them off in the imaginative area T you have got to be there to support them with their problem-solving (construction), how to put one bit with another when you are putting a straight bit to a curved NN
Routine/ domestic	High	I came in took the register, penny parade and snack table NN I took a turn with the dishes today PL
Encouraging involvement	Medium	she was sitting at the back, I asked her if she would like to come and play the game PL I thought if I was a patient it might encourage the others to be patients T
General interactions	Medium	I let our conversation go on, I didn't have anything specific to talk about PL had a wee chat and went to free play NN
Observation/ assessment	Medium	I am trying to monitor their mouse skills, so I decided I would sit with the children when they were doing it and see how they were doing it really T I wanted to see how he was with fine movement PL
Helping individuals	Medium	I was helping David, our special needs boy, with his skipping T I sat with him, he was missing his mum so I hugged him NN

FIGURE 5: STAFF ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY PRACTITIONERS (CONT.)

Staff Actions	Frequency reported	Examples
Disciplining	Medium	I had to discipline her, explained that her behaviour was unacceptable and sent her to apologise to the adult PL I was trying to settle them down, give them something quiet to do T
Providing resources	Medium	decided a lot of the construction had been over-played, so I decided to change it & got a linking construction set out T was preparing the templates of Christmas tree for the cutting PL
Questioning	Low	was about what made the paint change colour T
Explaining/ resources	Low	told them about paint, about mixing, making it thick or runny, showed how to mix two colours NN
Giving instructions	Low	reinforced again what the rules are, how they look at books, how they behave in that room T
Planning	Low	I planned to do jigsaws over 20 pieces NN
Stories/singing	Low	I read a story and we chatted about it PL
Interactions/ parents	Low	I spoke to that mother about speech therapy for her child T
Interactions/ other adults	Low	I was sitting with the students and showing them what to do NN

Practitioners' actions

Staff also talked about what they themselves did in the playroom. This discourse was heavily influenced by the conditions impinging on the setting, the activities they wished to sustain and the progress which children were making. The categories identified in the narratives are set out in Figure 5.

The accounts which staff gave of their actions were primarily concerned with maintaining normal and desirable patterns of activity as the most frequently mentioned categories illustrate. Staff acted to manage and sustain the activities which they wanted to encourage. Despite the tendency to assert homogeneity of role for all adults in the playroom, there were differences among staff evident in the data. Teachers were more likely to see themselves as responding to and helping individual children, and mentioned planning and questioning more often. They were less likely to be involved in routine and domestic duties. Nursery nurses were less likely than other staff to mention disciplining children or interacting with parents. While they put considerable emphasis on leading, supporting and maintaining playroom activities and interacting with children, play leaders were less likely to talk about planning, giving instructions, explaining to children or interacting with other adults. They were more likely than other staff to read stories, sing or carry out domestic or routine tasks.

Conclusions on the 'inside' perspective: how staff make sense of their playroom practice

The analysis of the accounts given by staff of their practice during actual playroom sessions revealed four distinctive characteristics in practitioners' thinking about their work. i.e.:

- their emphasis was primarily on the maintenance of patterns of playroom activity and experiences rather than some predetermined progress goals or learning outcomes
- they tended to concentrate on responding to evidence of children's development rather than evaluating the achievement of predetermined goals.
- staff had wide repertoires of actions which they drew upon primarily for their effectiveness in maintaining playroom activities which they saw as normal and desirable
- the most striking feature evident in the staff's construction of their work in the playroom was the concept of the conditions which impinge on that work. These conditions were seen as influencing the standards which could be maintained in the activities or progress achieved, and the choice of actions made by staff from their individual repertoires.

There was little evidence to suggest any significant differences in these general conclusions among staff with different backgrounds. Virtually all of the data conformed to the conceptual framework which emerged from the analysis of the interviews (Figure 1). Although it is not possible to generalise with confidence from the small sample in this study the data gathered do suggest some differences in emphasis among the three groups of practitioners, for example:

- teachers placed a greater emphasis on the importance of establishing the conditions for learning
- play leaders placed less emphasis on progress and activities in cognitive,

language and skills areas and were particularly concerned with disruptive behaviour and the importance of children being willing to engage in activities

- nursery nurses placed a heavy emphasis, in comparison with other staff, on the development and practice of life skills but less emphasis on social skills.

Aspirations for pre-school practice

The aspirational or 'outside' perspective on pre-school practice was expressed in a written *Framework for Good Practice*, which was developed initially from published guidelines and descriptions and research evidence (see References). This draft was refined through consultation with a group of experienced assessors of pre-school practice to present a clear view of what people responsible for pre-school provision regarded as 'good practice'.

The *Framework for Good Practice* was constructed around three roles which staff should fulfill to meet the learning and care needs of pre-school children, support their development and offer a curriculum which meets established guidelines. The roles were construed as:

- planners and providers (responsible for children's learning needs, safety and establishing secure and caring relationships)
- facilitators (understanding child development and learning)
- observers and assessors (relating observations to plans, ensuring continuity and progression and reporting progress to parents).

FIGURE 6: *FRAMEWORK FOR GOOD PRACTICE*: EXAMPLES FROM THE ROLE REQUIREMENTS AND EXEMPLAR INDICATORS

Role: Planner and provider **Requirement** 1.2 Staff should provide an environment offering security, stability and caring relationships	**Exemplar Indicators** continuity of care is given by minimising staff changes during the course of the day; the key worker is the main communicator with parents
Role: Observer and Assessor **Requirement 3.3** Report to parents about their child's progress and development	**Exemplar Indicators** staff set aside time to talk to parents/carers about how their child has settled in; staff set aside time to talk to parents about their child's progress and development at the end of the pre-school year

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For each role a series of requirements was set out accompanied by exemplar indicators of good practice (see examples in Figure 6). The applicability of the *Framework* was examined in three ways:

- by direct observation of identified 'good practice'
- from the responses to the *Framework* of practitioners in the settings observed
- through consultation with the experienced assessors of pre-school provision.

Observation of good practice

Observations were made to examine the applicability of the *Framework* as a way of describing good practice. In settings where there was recognised good provision, playroom practice was observed for one 'session'. The *Framework* was used to record playroom practice directly, recording staff behaviour in terms of the roles, role requirements and sample indicators set out. Following or during the observation period staff were asked about aspects of their practice which could not readily be observed and field notes were made to record, for example, areas of provision offered but not engaged in during the period observed.

The bulk of observations of directly recorded staff behaviour in the playroom referred to staff practice described in the *Framework* as staff acting as planners and providers. Direct observable evidence of staff meeting nine of the 11 requirements set out in the aspirations for that role was found. During the observation period, there was no evidence of staff using community facilities or ensuring equal opportunities in the playroom. In the settings observed some aspects of good practice were seen more frequently than others. The provision of learning experiences which promoted 'communication and language' and 'knowledge and understanding of the world' were the most frequently observed aspects of staff acting as planners and providers, followed by offering experiences which promote 'social and emotional development'. For the second role, staff acting as facilitators, examples were found of staff fulfilling all the requirements set out for the role although here too the frequency with which each requirement was observed varied. Staff were most frequently observed 'promoting children's learning' (very often by asking 'extending' questions) followed (though much less frequently) by indicators of staff 'understanding the role of play, exploration, talking and listening in learning', 'establishing relationships with parents' and 'promoting positive behaviour'. Direct observable evidence was found of only two of the four requirements for staff acting as observers and assessors set out in the *Framework*. Staff were seen observing children in the playroom and reporting to parents (although only one example was found of the latter).

Some elements of practice were observed across the settings but were not present in the initial *Framework*. After consultation with the group of experienced assessors of pre-school provision, it was decided to add a cluster of these elements of practice to the *Framework* by adding the requirement that 'staff supervise activity throughout the playroom and manage transition between activities' to the 'staff as facilitators' role.

Although for some of the *Framework*'s role requirements there was no directly observable staff behaviour, evidence gathered from observations and discussions with staff suggested that, with the exception of one nursery, all elements of the *Framework* were seen as likely to be covered.

Staff reactions to the *Framework for Good Practice*

Following the observation session, when the *Framework for Good Practice* was examined, some staff at each location were interviewed to seek their reaction to the document. Staff interviewed (24) covered the range of roles and training backgrounds typically found in pre-school provision. There was widespread agreement that the three roles of staff as planners/providers, facilitators and observers/assessors could describe the work of good practitioners. There was some variation in the way in which each of these roles was fulfilled in each location and in the emphasis placed on related aspects of practice. However, this did not appear to challenge the agreement of the interviewees that the *Framework* was an acceptable description of good practice to which all staff working in pre-school provision would aspire.

Staff working in the settings observed had a range of qualifications and fulfilled a number of roles or job descriptions; they were employed as nursery nurses, teachers, heads of centre, managers, play leaders, key workers and auxiliary workers. Training and qualifications varied from part-time study over a number of weeks through SVQ qualifications to college and university courses. Despite this variation in background among the staff working in any one setting (and corresponding differences in payment and status), there was a common contention running through the interviews with staff that there was not, and should not be, any differences in the playroom working patterns of staff from different backgrounds. The observations of practice suggested that where there were differences in who did what in the playroom, these revolved around the degree of involvement in particular activities, rather than as differences in the kinds activities undertaken. Variations between staff can perhaps be attributed to two influences. The first of these is management or organisational decision making which prescribes roles and precludes aspects of practice from some but not others. The second may arise from the way in which practitioners from different back grounds think about their work.

Conclusions on developing an outside, generalised description of good practice

The results of the observations and the interviews were presented to the group of experienced assessors of pre-school provision. This group concluded that the observations of practice using the *Framework for Good Practice* and the responses of practitioners to the *Framework* supported the document as a context-free, generally acceptable description of the role of a good pre-school practitioner in the playroom.

A two-stranded approach to thinking about practice

As a result of this research, we have developed two ways of representing practice in pre-school provision. One strand stems from conventional descriptive and prescriptive methodology and consists of context-free generalisations of the sorts of activities into which good practice can be categorised, that is the *Framework for Good Practice*. Inevitably this provides a picture which, from the practitioners' perspective, is incomplete because it cannot include the context-dependent factors (such as the influence of 'conditions') which are so influential in practitioners' thinking. The analytical framework derived from practitioners' talking about how they make sense of their work in the playroom (the 'inside' perspective) does take account of the context and describes how practitioners think about playroom practice. In some ways these two approaches are aligned with different contexts in pre-school provision. The *Framework for Good Practice* represents the context and concerns of policy makers and trainers, while the situated, 'inside' perspective represents the context and daily demands on the practitioners.

Knowledge of the way in which practitioners make sense of their practice in the playroom gives insight into the day-to-day thinking of staff and the influences which pervade their practice. The formal *Framework* on the other hand provides a structure against which practitioners can plan and assess their practice in relation to the expectations of the outside world. Both the perspectives are legitimate ways of conceptualising pre-school practice and are potentially useful in improving the quality of practice. However, the potential power of these two perspectives depends on two facets of their interaction. First, it is essential that policy makers and trainees have an understanding of how practitioners make sense of their own practice if the intention is to improve or develop that practice. Second, practitioners have to be prepared to reflect on their own practice and examine their own ideas in relation to what is expected of them by the 'outside' world.

Continuing professional development

Any concern with improvements in the quality of pre-school provision has to consider how it is going to address matters of continuing professional development (CPD). If the concern is with the CPD of experienced staff then it is necessary to start from where they are in their practice and thinking, and not to assume that they are where the developer would like them to be. This implies understanding how they construe and evaluate their own work and how they make judgments. This 'professional craft knowledge' (PCK), largely acquired through playroom experience rather than formal education channels, underpins the way in which staff go about their everyday work and is the 'inside' perspective described above.

By starting from a recognition of their own thinking and insights, staff will gain much greater positive reinforcement, personal satisfaction and higher motivation to reflect on their own practices. They are more likely to be prepared to consider the possibilities for development of their practice in relation to a formal 'expert' framework and to offer rational rather than emotional criticism of it.

The priorities for such a strategy are first to recognise and provide access to staff's own PCK and that of their colleagues, and second, to make them accountable for reflection on the relationship between that knowledge and the formal 'outside' model. CPD would then be carried out in four stages:

- framework for professional craft knowledge – this could offer a means of organising the thinking of staff about their own playroom practice, comprising something like the framework in Figure 1. It would be essential to take account here of the context in which they work and the conditions which impinge on playroom activity. Staff would be invited to consider their own playroom practice in relation to the kind of organiser in Figure 1 and to adapt it as necessary, creating their own PCK framework
- observation of playroom practice – staff would be invited to help each other to talk about their work in a particular session, following the approach adopted in this project. They would be asked to give an account of what they thought had gone well in a chosen session, what they did to achieve this and what had an influence on what they did, and what they could expect of the children and activities on that occasion. Using their own version of the PCK framework they would be invited to do some broad analysis of their own and others' accounts of the work of the playroom
- exposure to the formal 'expert' framework – at this stage, the more formal model is introduced, i.e. the *Framework for Good Practice* developed in the process of this project or a similar document. At this point attention could be drawn to various requirements of government, professional bodies or other institutions, and official explanations and justifications for the contents of the formal framework
- explicit requirement to reflect on PCK and the 'expert' framework – this stage will engage participants in constructive criticism of both the 'outside' or 'expert' framework and their own thinking and practice. It is essential that this debate is open on all sides, following the message inherent in the preceding stages that the practitioner's thinking is valued in the same way as that of the experts or trainers. The expert or trainer should become less of a privileged leader and more like an informed conductor.

This approach to in-service training does require trainers to change their traditional ways of thinking about and practising CPD. It is important, however, to avoid falling into the trap of the deficit model and suggesting that the way in which training is currently conducted is in some way deficient. It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that a comparable programme of CPD for trainers is established, to enable them to reflect on their own PCK and the demands of this new approach before they can be expected to introduce a staged pattern of development of the kind outlined above. In the research reported here some differences between staff with different roles and backgrounds were identified. It would be sensible to ensure that such differences were openly discussed, asking whether such differences are generalisable and, if so, appropriate and desirable for pre-school provision in Scotland.

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Part One

Focus on Quality

Chapter Four

What Do Parents Really Want From Pre-school Education?

Christine Howe, Hugh Foot, Bill Cheyne, Melody Terras and Catherine Rattray

Previous research (Osborn and Millbank, 1987) has highlighted the importance of parental interest in children's education. But what exactly do Scottish parents want from pre-school education: this is the topic explored here. In October 1997, research was initiated into parents' preferences concerning the form that pre-school education provision should take, the role they wished to play in ensuring that their preferences are met and the satisfaction that they feel with their actual experiences of pre-school provision. The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department's Educational Research Unit funded the research.

The researchers adopted a multi-method approach. The first phase, conducted between January and April 1998, used a survey method. This involved the analysis of 991 completed postal questionnaires, which had been sent out to a sample of 3,315 parents of differing socio-economic and employment status, representative of urban and rural populations across Scotland.

In the second phase, carried out from May to September 1998, interview and observation data were obtained from the parents and staff associated with 16 pre-school establishments – playgroups, local authority and private nurseries – which differed in the amount of parental involvement they experienced. These methods provided an in-depth follow up to the survey. This chapter summarises the combined findings from both phases of the research.

Context

The demand for pre-school education provision has increased steadily in recent years. In 1997-98, 90 per cent of children in Scotland participated in pre-school provision in the year immediately prior to starting school, with government commitment to universal provision of a part-time place for every child whose parent/carer wanted one by the end of the 1998-99 session. Participation in pre-school provision is a crucial part of the government's national childcare strategy, which aims to raise standards in education, tackle social exclusion from the earliest age and provide an integrated early years' service to support working parents (Scottish Office News Release 0651/98, 30 March 1998).

While this emphasis is potentially justified, there is no doubt that simply guaranteeing participation is not enough – children will only benefit from pre-school provision if the provision meets certain standards of quality. Moreover, this poses a significant challenge because quality is known to rest upon a multitude of factors (Ball, 1994), for example:

- an appropriate curriculum encouraging active learning and purposeful play
- good practices with respect to the selection, training and continuity of staff
- acceptable staff-child ratios
- the provision of adequate buildings and equipment
- a relationship of 'partnership' between parents and providers.

This last factor underpinned the present research, in which we attempted to clarify those aspects of the parental perspective relevant to achieving a sense of partnership.

Research aims

The research was designed to explore in detail the factors influencing parental preferences for particular types of pre-school provision and fill important gaps in our knowledge about what parents in Scotland specifically want their children to gain from it. It also attempted to assess the nature of, and extent to which, parents are already involved (and might wish to become more involved) in pre-school provision. Finally it was concerned with parental satisfaction with the pre-school provision they have experienced and their aspirations for change.

Methodology

The survey in Phase 1 was conducted with the parents of Primary One children because their children would recently have completed their participation in pre-school, and consequently these parents should:

- have a wider experience of pre-school provision
- reflect 'naturally' the proportions of parents whose children attended different types of provision
- feel no constraint in expressing their views.

The primary schools involved in the survey were selected from all regions of the country, in proportion to the population of children in each education authority area.

Ninety-one per cent of the 911 returned questionnaires were completed by mothers – mothers of boys and mothers of girls were more or less equally represented and 86 per cent of respondents were married or living with a partner.

In over 98 per cent of cases the survey respondents had sent their child to some type of pre-school provision. The types of pre-school provision that had been attended were categorised as follows:

- local authority nursery school or class (most parents did not make a distinction)
- playgroup
- private day nurseries
- other types of provision, for example day centres, local authority day nurseries, and family centres.

Many of the children, of course, attended more than one type of provision at some stage during their pre-school career. Table 1 shows, therefore, the percentages of parents whose children attended each type of provision at some stage during their pre-school career (left-hand column) and the percentages attending each type uniquely, to the exclusion of all others (right-hand column).

In contrast to the survey, the interviews and observation in phase 2 involved parents whose children were currently in pre-school provision (nine local authority nurseries, five playgroups and two private nurseries). We felt that any changes in parental views due to recent policy initiatives could be detected by working with current users of pre-school provision. Ninety-one parents and 23 members of staff were interviewed on issues such as:

- the reasons why parents become involved
- the encouragement and support given by staff
- the types of help that parents provide
- whether parents are used effectively
- whether training for involvement is necessary.

A sub-sample of 12 parents and seven staff was studied in the establishments, each individual being observed for 30 minutes. Observations covered the type and nature of the activity they engaged in, and with whom they interacted.

TABLE 1: TYPES OF PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION ATTENDED (PERCENTAGES BASED ON (N=882)

	All attendances	**One type only**
Local authority nursery	79	27
Playgroup	64	15
Private nursery	22	6
Other	7	1

Parental preferences

Survey respondents rated 24 separate factors which they had considered when choosing pre-school provision in the year prior to formal schooling. The importance attached to each factor was rated as 'essential' – 1, 'very important' – 2, 'quite important' – 3, or 'not important' – 4. Statistical analysis showed that factors clustered into five clear categories which we have labelled 'care and safety', 'education', 'setting', 'convenience' and 'parents' needs'. The individual factors associated with each cluster are given in Table 2, along with their mean importance ratings. Concern for care and safety of the children turned out to be paramount, followed by concern for educational standards and the overall setting. Convenience and attention to the needs of the parents were least important.

The ordering of these preferences was not influenced by parents' employment or socio-economic status, nor by whether they lived in urban or rural areas. The type of provision to which parents sent their children did, however, bear some relationship to their preferences. It is true to say that 'care and safety' was the most important factor, regardless of the type of provision chosen. Nevertheless, it is interesting that users of nurseries, particularly local authority nurseries, weighted education more strongly than did users of playgroups. It is also of potential importance that users of private nurseries placed more emphasis on convenience and the meeting of parents' needs than did the users of other types of provision (see Table 3 below).

The results are consistent with other findings from the research that parents, when evaluating the aims and objectives of pre-school provision, differentiate between nurseries and playgroups. The most noticeable feature is that they align playgroups with play activities and nurseries – both local authority and private – with education. This distinction was made by 72 per cent of the survey parents, and was confirmed in the interviews. Typical responses from parents were:

> *The playgroup was just supervised playing. At nursery his education had started, although he thought it was just playing.*

TABLE 2: IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS WHEN SELECTING PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION FROM 1 = ESSENTIAL TO 4 = NOT IMPORTANT. (N=816 – 873)

	Mean rating
Care and safety	
child happy	1.2
safety	1.2
care	1.3
attitude	1.3
cluster mean	**1.23**

Please see next page for rest of Table 2

TABLE 2: IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS WHEN SELECTING PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION FROM 1 = ESSENTIAL TO 4 = NOT IMPORTANT. (N=816 – 873) – continued

	Mean rating
Education	
reputation	1.5
preparation for school	1.5
staff qualifications	1.6
settle in school	1.6
education	1.6
reading and maths	2.5
cluster mean	**1.69**
Setting	
play and toys	1.7
individual attention	1.8
number of children	1.9
information and advice	1.9
cluster mean	**1.77**
Convenience	
travel	2.3
hours	2.4
cost	2.8
cluster mean	**2.52**
Parents' needs	
parental involvement	2.6
multi-cultured	2.8
special needs	2.9
another child attending	3.2
provision for under threes	3.3
classes for parents	3.4
sponsored places	3.4
cluster mean	**3.02**

TABLE 3: IMPORTANCE RATINGS FOR TYPES OF PROVISION ATTENDED (N=816 – 873)

	Local authority nursery	**Playgroup**	**Private nursery**
Care and safety	1.27	1.23	1.15
Education	1.66	1.89	1.73
Setting	1.77	1.84	2.58
Convenience	2.44	2.54	2.28
Parents' needs	2.96	3.18	2.09

and

> *Nursery classes are far more structured and follow local authority guidelines and curriculum. Playgroups tend to be more play and running about and less organised.*

A high population of the survey parents (80 per cent) selected nurseries for the immediate pre-school year (71 per cent local authority and 9 per cent private) and 91 per cent of all parents acknowledged the benefits of pre-school provision in helping to settle children into primary school. We conclude, therefore, that as the onset of formal education approaches for their children, parents (to the extent that choice is available to them) are opting for establishments that they perceive (rightly or wrongly) to promote educational ends. The responses of our interviewees reinforced this impression – many of them reported moving (or intending to move) their children from playgroups to nurseries during the immediate pre-school year.

One finding of particular concern – revealed by plotting the types of provision used against residential status – is the very low usage of local authority nurseries in rural areas (population densities under 1,000). Whereas nearly 50 per cent of parents in urban and intermediate areas sent their children to local authority nurseries, only 11 per cent in rural areas used such nurseries. This also contrasts with the high usage of playgroups (35 per cent) and private nurseries (30 per cent) by parents in rural areas. Since parents in rural areas have the same preferences as parents elsewhere, we can only assume that local authority nurseries are sparse in rural areas and that adequate numbers of places in establishments that parents would prefer are just not available.

The main findings on parental preferences are that:

- when selecting pre-school provision, parents are concerned with (in descending order) care and safety, education, setting, convenience and parents' needs
- parents believe that playgroups focus on play and nurseries on education. Parents tend to switch children to nurseries in preparation for school, from which we can infer that they act as consumers, guided by explicit preferences and expectations
- parents have greater difficulty in rural rather than urban areas in meeting their preferences for their children's education because (we assume) local authority places are in short supply
- parents who use private nurseries place greater emphasis on convenience and having their needs met than users of other types of provision.

Parental involvement

Despite acknowledgement 30 years ago that parental involvement was important in children's education (e.g. Plowden Report, 1967), such involvement remains variable across and within types of pre-school provision (Osborn and Millbank, 1987). Recent research suggests that the voucher scheme may have actively reduced parental involvement (Stephen, Low, Brown, Bell, Cope, Morris and Waterhouse, 1998). However, involvement can take many forms and it is important to know not just what level of involvement currently exists but also what attitudes parents have towards involvement.

Table 4 lists nine activities, established from earlier studies (e.g. Sharp & Davis, 1997) and pilot work for the present research, which embrace all the kinds of involvement which parents typically have. These activities were found from the survey data to cluster into three distinctive groups:

- helping with daily activities
- helping with special events
- helping with administration.

Table 4 indicates what the survey parents perceived as the availability of these different kinds of involvement and the extent to which they themselves participated.

It was clear from the survey results that both availability and usage vary considerably across types of provision. Involvement in parents' evenings and concerts was greatest in local authority nurseries. Playing with children, planning, making decisions and maintenance featured more in playgroups than in other types of provision. Fundraising and helping with trips were more evenly distributed between local authority nurseries and playgroups. Private nurseries were associated with participation in parents' evenings and concerts, and with the continuation of activities at home, but displayed negligible amounts of participation in other areas. Interviews with parents accentuated these differences. It appeared that:

- playgroups are characterised by high levels of involvement for daily activities, special events and administration
- private nurseries are characterised by involvement for special events, but no involvement for daily activities or administration
- local authority nurseries are characterised by levels of involvement somewhere in between.

TABLE 4: AVAILABILITY AND USAGE OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT (PERCENTAGES BASED ON N=888 – 897)

Types of involvement	Availability	Usage		
		Frequently	On Occasion	Never
Daily activities				
Play/help with children	70	25	47	25
Special events				
Parents' evenings	79	42	53	5
Fundraising	84	34	60	5
Trips/excursions	82	24	53	22
Concerts/plays	78	40	53	7
Continue at home*	94	27	46	26
Administration				
Discuss/plan activities	58	19	56	24
Decisions about group	44	16	35	49
Help with maintenance	44	11	39	50

* 'Continue at home' refers to activities initiated at pre-school which are adopted/developed at home

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Not surprisingly, playing with the children was a major type of involvement for playgroup parents, mainly because a compulsory rota was commonplace (cited by 40 per cent of playgroup parents as a reason for their involvement).

Whereas many parents were not involved in their pre-school child's education because of work or other family commitments, a high proportion of parents (62 per cent) from local authority and private nurseries cited lack of opportunity as a reason for non-involvement and expressed their willingness to participate. Such comments were never recorded from playgroup parents. It appeared from the interviews that there was a discrepancy between parents and staff about the extent to which parents were perceived to be encouraged to participate in pre-school provision. The level of encouragement for involvement reported by parents did not seem to be as great as that which staff claimed to have given them. The level of willingness to become involved expressed by parents of children in local authority nurseries far exceeded the opportunities they felt they had been offered. Sixty per cent of local authority nursery parents and 47 per cent of private nursery parents indicated their willingness (in principle) to help even though work and other commitments would considerably reduce the number available to do so.

Daily activities of playgroup parents also tended to be more diverse than those of nursery parents. In playgroups parents engaged in considerably more supervisory and organisational work – tidying up, supervising snacks, organising activities – whereas in nurseries parents tended to engage only in play activities. Parents certainly perceived staff as exercising more control over parental activities in nurseries; in playgroups parents helped, more or less, whenever they saw that they could be useful, and sought advice when they needed it. Strangely, staff reported the opposite impression but since, from our observations, there was a higher level of staff-parent interaction in playgroups than in nurseries, it is possible that playgroup parents were receiving more guidance than they acknowledged.

Parents' motivation for being involved was driven partly by their desire to monitor the activities and progress of their child. According to one parent:

> *I wanted to see how my son was getting on –*
> *who he played with and what he got up to.*

Yet 88 per cent of parents interviewed stated that they tried to avoid focusing on or playing with their own child while working in the establishment. As one member of staff reported:

> *They try to ignore their own child, but the child tends to play up then. We encourage parents to work with the other children to show their child they can't always get their own way.*

In addition, though, the parents' social agenda and their desire to meet other parents and staff dictated their level of involvement. Parents derived considerable enjoyment and personal satisfaction from assisting with special events (over 50 per cent) and, under direct staff control, assisting with administration (35 per cent). Parents were aware that excursions might depend on their support in order to achieve the necessary 1:2 adult-child ratio, laid down in the Scottish Pre-school Playgroup Association guidelines.

Parents and staff generally believed that parental involvement would ease staff workload and improve staff-parent relations, and make the children feel more secure and help their self-esteem. One third of uninvolved parents would have liked more administrative responsibility but believed, from the unenthusiastic response of staff, that this was not on offer. It has to be said that lack of enthusiasm of staff for parental involvement in administration was detectable in staff interview responses.

Parents and staff also reflected on the main advantages and disadvantages associated with parental involvement. Table 5 summarises the main points reported in the survey of parents. It is significant that, while 44 per cent of the sample listed one or more advantages, only 13 per cent listed any disadvantages.

It is also interesting that, while the advantages listed are mostly in terms of parents gleaning more information about their children, the disadvantages focus more on the impact of the parent's presence on the child – perhaps causing the child to play up or inhibiting the development of independence. Both parents and staff (particularly staff) were concerned about the possibility of interference with staff and an unprofessional attitude on the part of the parents – failure to turn up or

TABLE 5: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Advantages (percentages based on N=401)	**Frequency**
Awareness of child's activities	23
Monitor development	12
Know service delivered	12
Child secure	11
Input into development	8
Good staff relations	6
Disadvantages (percentages based on N=118)	
Negative influence on child	46
Work commitment	22
Interfere with professionals	17

do their rota, wanting to chat too much, violating confidentiality by gossiping about individual children. As two staff members put it:

> *Security and confidentiality is a problem. They shouldn't discuss other children but they do.*

and

> *Chatting stops you doing your job and it's difficult to strike a balance between working and being friendly.*

Despite these acknowledged points of tension, the majority of both parents and staff thought that parents were used as effectively as they could be and had few ideas about improvements that could be made. Two thirds of parents and staff thought that any form of training for parents was unnecessary, on the basis that just by virtue of being parents they had all the training and experience needed. There was some sympathy amongst staff for the notion that their own training should include guidance on working with and handling parents.

We found, in general, that:

- three forms of parental involvement could be identified – involvement with daily activities, special events, and administration. Although the pattern of involvement varies according to the type of provision, parental involvement is most frequent in playgroups
- the evidence suggests that opportunities to become involved are sufficient to fulfil the needs and wishes of playgroup parents but not those of nursery parents. There is a considerable pool of willingness to become involved in the nursery sector which is not being taken up
- there was little enthusiasm amongst staff in nurseries for parental involvement in administration, although one third of parents interviewed would have liked more administrative responsibility
- parents and staff see a range of advantages in parental involvement, including awareness of the child's abilities, monitoring development, and easing staff workload. Parents also enjoy the opportunity to interact with other parents and establish social networks. However, this may be a point of tension with staff if it prevents work being done or violates confidentiality
- the general view of both parents and staff in all types of provision is that parents are used as effectively as they can be, although staff feel the need for more training in working with parents.

Parental satisfaction

Our survey and interviews indicated that parents' satisfaction with pre-school provision was overwhelming and unanimous. Table 6 lists the benefits that parents attached to attendance – many parents perceived more than one benefit. The main benefit for children, cited by far the most frequently, was opportunity for social interaction, and was reflected in many of the parents' comments:

> *It helped with socialising with other children of the same age, i.e. communicating and sharing. There was also learning about how to be part of a group and not the most important person in the room but still important.*

and

> *Interaction with other children of varying ages was what counted, and social behaviour involved with groups of children.*

Table 6 also lists why parents thought that pre-school experience helped children to settle into primary school, and again very similar benefits seem to be involved. The type of provision experienced did not seem make a substantial difference as regards the benefits reported

TABLE 6: BENEFITS OF PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION IDENTIFIED BY PARENTS (PERCENTAGES)

	Frequency
General benefits (N=442)	
Social interaction	74
Independence	22
Routine/discipline	19
Range of experience	15
Educational foundations	11
	Frequency
Benefits for primary school (N=870)	
Independence	35
Routine/discipline	23
Liaison with primary school	17
Continuity with peers	14
Educational foundations	7

A more direct measure of satisfaction was tapped through parents' views about the way that staff handled various issues. Table 7 gives mean satisfaction ratings for seven key staff behaviours. Responses were scored from 'highly satisfied' – 1 to 'dissatisfied' – 4. The means indicate a very acceptable level of all-round satisfaction and this was demonstrated across all types of provision.

Parents were equally satisfied with information they received both about their child's physical and emotional needs (89 per cent), and their activities and development (91 per cent). Around 500 parents rated their satisfaction with staff feedback and only 10 per cent of these voiced reasons for dissatisfaction, which

TABLE 7: PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH STAFF BEHAVIOUR (PERCENTAGES BASED ON N=846 – 887)

Behaviour	**Mean rating (1 – 4)**
Staff discuss concerns	1.43
Contact with staff	1.46
Staff attitude to parents	1.50
Staff dealing with complaints	1.57
Feedback on children	1.59
Making special arrangements	1.63
Parents' views considered	1.65

were mainly to do with staff being uninterested or lack of staff contact. Parents, where given an opportunity to report needed improvements, tended to mention 'access' issues (in particular the availability of provision and opening times) rather than 'quality' or 'human relations' issues. Eight per cent of parents felt that the educational element of pre-school provision fell short of ideal.

Although preferences, involvement and satisfaction have been discussed as three separate dimensions of parents' perceptions, they are, of course, intimately interrelated. It would be surprising, for example, if parents were still satisfied when their preferences were not being met. But what exactly are the interconnections? Correlational analyses enabled some general conclusions to be drawn, for example that:

- the more emphasis playgroup parents placed on care and safety, the more satisfied they were
- the more emphasis local authority nursery parents placed on education, the more satisfied they were
- the more emphasis private nursery parents placed on parental needs, the more satisfied they were.

It can be inferred, given what the research has documented about parents' views on the nature of different types of provision, that satisfaction is closely related to having expectations met.

Involvement in playgroup activities was not related to preferences and satisfaction: playgroup parents had all the opportunities for involvement that they desired. However, for parents of children who attended local authority and private nurseries, involvement was related to satisfaction – involved parents were more likely to be satisfied, particularly if the involvement was with special events (local authority nurseries) and administration (private nurseries).

To summarise, the research indicated that:

- parents are highly satisfied with pre-school provision. They value it in particular because of the opportunities that it affords children for social interaction, developing independence, and as preparation for primary school
- parents are also satisfied with the quality of the contact that they have with staff and the willingness of staff to address parents' concerns, deal with complaints and make special arrangements
- staff are perceived as giving adequate feedback about children's development and their physical and emotional needs. The limited dissatisfaction voiced by parents centres on staff who are uninterested, and problems of access and opening times.
- preference, involvement and satisfaction are interrelated – the more that parents feel that playgroups, local authority and private nurseries have succeeded in delivering what they expect them to deliver, the more satisfied they are. Involved parents in local authority and private nurseries are more likely to be satisfied than uninvolved parents – involvement does not, by contrast, make a difference in playgroups.

Conclusions

The research confirms the role of parents as willing partners in the process of delivering high quality pre-school provision, but has also identified various points of relevance to policy, for example that:

- parents have different preferences and expectations of pre-school provision. These preferences change as children progress from age three to five with the focus shifting from play to education. Therefore diversity and choice of provision should be maintained and extended
- evenness of access is not currently assured. There is a shortage of accessible local authority nurseries in rural areas. This means that parents in rural areas have less access to provision that they believe (rightly or wrongly) to deliver the educational curriculum which they would like for their child in the immediate pre-school year

- parental involvement is a good way of ensuring that parents are well-informed – it improves the accuracy and quality of information about pre-school provision within the local community. The research also shows that this information is primarily transmitted through informal 'grapevines'
- amounts and types of involvement by parents in local authority nurseries are less than in playgroups – yet nursery parents are willing to be more involved than they are currently
- we would argue that parental roles and responsibilities should be more clearly articulated and new working relationships negotiated with providers
- parents bring their own social agenda when they offer to become involved and this agenda needs to be catered for by permitting social opportunities with other parents and staff. Therefore building in some recognisable provision for this in terms of time and facilities should encourage parents to participate, and may reduce tensions with staff
- a stronger sense of professionalism and responsibility amongst involved parents needs to be encouraged – especially in their relationships with staff, other non-involved parents and the children in their care
- even though many parents and staff believe that training for parents is unnecessary, it must be recognised that any supportive role undertaken by parents carries serious responsibilities. Therefore some form of training for these parents is desirable. The distinctions between having and not having responsibility drawn by some parents is not really tenable – all work with children requires commitment and professionalism. On the other hand, in order to win parents over to training it may be that the training has to be fairly modest, and carried out by the staff in the unit where the parent is likely to work
- parents' activities in nurseries and playgroups may be somewhat restricted in nature, but with appropriate training there is no reason why they should not take on more responsibility (especially administrative responsibility)
- the training of staff needs to place more emphasis on handling parents – how to use parents more effectively and how to prepare them for working with the children. Staff agree that this would be useful.

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Part Two

Extending Provision

Chapter Five

Vouchers, Parents and Providers

Christine Stephen, Lesley Low, Sally Brown, David Bell, Peter Cope, Brian Morris and Steve Waterhouse

The Pre-school Education Voucher Initiative pilot schemes, introduced in England, Wales and Scotland in 1996, were an important part of the Conservative government's education policy. The aims of the Initiative were to expand pre-school education, and encourage a variety of provision. There was already an established demand for pre-school provision, and the priority underpinning the Initiative was to stimulate the supply of pre-school places. The schemes ran for two years in Scotland. Here a team from the University of Stirling describe an evaluation that they conducted of the first year of voucher trials. This research, which involved the collection of data from parents, providers, national and local government officials and representatives of pre-school umbrella organisations, was funded by The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department.

Structure of the Pre-school Education Voucher Initiative pilot scheme

There were two main strands to the pilot scheme. First, each child was eligible to receive vouchers (to the value of £1,100) which could be exchanged for a part-time place in pre-school provision. This pre-school provision had to be registered with *The Scottish Office* as meeting quality standards set by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Schools. Second, parents were able to choose where to 'spend' their vouchers amongst these registered providers. The scheme did not offer a guaranteed place with a particular type of provider nor did it guarantee that the same provision would be available for every child.

In Scotland the scheme was piloted in the school year 1996-97 in selected local authority (LA) areas. Local authorities who wanted to participate had to submit a bid to operate the scheme together with detailed plans as to how it would be implemented in their area. Four local authorities were selected: two ran the scheme across their full geographical area; two, serving predominantly scattered and rural communities, operated only in selected parts. An over-representation of sparsely populated rural areas and places where there was traditionally a low level of provision meant that the selection was not typical of Scottish local authorities.

Within the pilot areas, any provider in the local authority, private or voluntary sector who offered two or more nursery sessions per week and met the HMI requirements for registration could participate. (A session had to be at least two and a half hours long).

No Gaelic-medium pre-school provider was involved in the pilot scheme and relatively few applications were later made for voucher registration by Gaelic-medium providers across Scotland.

The research programme

Four major issues addressed by the research were:

- whether the intended expansion had been achieved
- how parents and pre-school providers had responded to the scheme
- the impact of the Initiative on particular forms of provision
- market displacement effects, and matters of finance.

Methodology

The research evidence drew on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, beginning with initial small-scale collections of quantitative information from parents and providers, which helped the subsequent surveys to identify and focus on those features which were of greatest interest to those involved. Qualitative elements from the surveys enabled the research to give more precise estimates of the relative importance of different factors and outcomes. An economic analysis of the market for pre-school vouchers was also carried out.

Each phase of the collection and analysis of data built on the previous stage either by expanding on the database (e.g. using group interviews with 116 parents as a basis for a large-scale telephone survey of parents) or by exploring further issues raised. Table 1 offers a summary of the three phases of data collection. The research questions specified for the project demanded that more data was collected from the private and voluntary sector providers than from local authority providers.

TABLE 1: DATA COLLECTION – TIMETABLE AND SOURCES

	Term 1	**Term 2**	**Term 3**
Local authority – Education	Interviews with directors, assistant directors and pre-five officers	Evaluation seminar	Return interviews Evaluation seminar
SOEID/HMI	Interviews with SOEID and HMI		Return interviews
Umbrella groups	Interviews with representatives of five organisations	Evaluation seminar	Return interviews with three orgnisations Evaluation seminar
Parents	Group interviews at sites visited and some individual tele--phone interviews (116 parents)	Telephone interviews (671 parents) Telephone interviews with: - parents of children with special educational needs (19) - parents not redeeming vouchers (15)	Telephone interviews continued SEN interviews continued
Providers	Site visits in all local authority areas (31 sites: 14 local authority, 8 private, 9 voluntary). Telephone interviews with all private and voluntary providers not visited (85 in total)		Telephone interviews with 46 providers

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Expansion of pre-school provision

One of the primary aims of the scheme was to expand provision for pre-school children in the local authority, private and voluntary sectors. The study found clear evidence of substantial expansion in the local authority sector, but there was no expansion in the private and voluntary sectors.

Reasons for expansion in local authority provision

There was a substantial expansion in local authority places – 75 per cent on average. (One rural authority increased its pre-school places by a factor of ten). The total number of available places increased from about 1,600 to about 2,800 in the pilot areas. The expansion was catered for mainly within existing accommodation.

There appear to be four main reasons why there was expansion in local authority provision, but not in the private and voluntary sectors. First, local authorities already had the potential for expansion in their own systems and institutions. They could call on other budgets to underwrite the full costs of implementation and had considerable flexibility in staffing arrangements. They also had some flexibility in terms of available accommodation. Second, other sectors had more difficulty in finding finance to underwrite expansion – all sectors agreed that voucher income was not sufficient to cover the full costs. Third, various factors combined to undermine plans for expansion in the private and voluntary sectors – uncertainties of a commercial nature, apparent preferences of the majority of parents for local authority provision, and 'scare' stories in the media about the likely policies of a new government (there was a General Election on 1 May 1997). Lastly, the voluntary sector expressed fears for their future, foreseeing considerable contraction in provision, based on some evidence that such contraction had already started.

Private and voluntary sector provision

The data gathered suggested that the patterns of provision for different age groups in the private and voluntary sectors were changed very little by the introduction of the scheme. No new voluntary or private sector provision opened during the pilot year but there were two closures, both in the voluntary sector. Uncertainties about the demand for provision for four year olds, and a desire to maintain or capture the loyalty of parents of younger children seemed to have prevented any major shift of attention to pre-school children only. Waiting lists were rare and rather more than half of the private sector providers had empty places. Only a few were seeking to improve their facilities or to increase staffing, marketing and hours/weeks of opening.

Changes in provision for younger children

By the end of the pilot year, there were indications of further changes in provision for younger children, for example:

- parents were reported to have increased their demand for places for two and three year olds
- some private providers had moved to accept children below the age of three
- other sectors expressed a major concern that local authorities might, where there was over-provision, recruit more three year olds to fill empty places.

The notion of a progression for the individual child from playgroup to nursery seemed to be growing in acceptance as the norm.

The market basis of the Initiative

The voucher system was intended to make Scottish pre-school provision much more market based and to encourage competition between local authority, private and voluntary providers. The market, however, was dominated by one type of provider – local authorities – which were able to exercise a degree of monopoly power. Providers in both the voluntary and private sectors were aware that they faced competition and for both of these sectors the main competition was thought to come from local authority providers. There was little evidence that voluntary and private providers responded to this perception of competition by changing their provision or their marketing. Generally, market 'displacement' seemed an inappropriate concept. The relationship between the local authority and the other providers could be better described as being complementary. Local authorities appeared to have identified types of provision which they were willing to leave to the others (for example provision for scattered rural areas or for working parents).

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Differences between the market sectors

One sector of the market, the private sector had some distinctive features. For example, private nurseries were more likely to offer longer hours (pre-9.00 a.m. and post-4.00 p.m.); more children attended afternoon sessions; private provision was open for periods outwith the school year; and in some cases collection and drop-off services were offered. This flexibility was attractive to working parents.

Impact of the Initiative on the working life of parents

The data showed that, in general, parents were:

- not looking for more employment
- happy with half-day provision
- taking advantage of the chance to use the vouchers in the private sector as a discount on the cost of childcare.

The parents' survey indicated that for the large majority of parents (85 per cent) the scheme had no impact on their economic activity. For the remaining 15 per cent, small numbers (mainly using private day-nursery provision) returned to employment, increased their hours, started training or undertook voluntary work.

Parents as consumers

Parents as consumers were concerned with the timing and availability of provision, how much provision they received in return for their vouchers, and the cost of paying for provision outwith the time bought by the vouchers.

The data gathered on consumer behaviour suggested that parents had a preference for morning rather than afternoon sessions (producing an imbalance in daily provision, especially in the local authority sector). Some parents, particularly in the voluntary sector, wished for (and would be prepared to pay for) more sessions. Some were already paying 'top-up' fees (but mostly in the private sector and averaging around £12 per week). Other payments made were largely for 'snack funds' (mainly in the local authority sector) and averaged about £2 per week.

Partnership among providers

As well as encouraging competition between providers, the Initiative also aimed for the creation of supportive partnerships or collaboration between the sectors. Providers in the private and voluntary sectors interpreted partnership as meaning local authority support for them. However, a majority of them (around three quarters) suggested that links with others remained mostly informal and had been unaffected by the introduction of vouchers. Furthermore, competition from expansion in the local authority sector was evident, particularly since parents were attracted to the continuity from nursery to primary school offered by local authority provision as part of the wider education system.

Support among providers within a competitive market was unlikely to work well. Local authorities were required by the Initiative to act both as providers and supporters of other providers. Reports from umbrella organisations in both the voluntary and private sectors reflected this difficulty. Respondents commented that :

- there was a scarcity of meetings, training sessions or other aspects of support
- there was some concern about the overlap of local authority social work and education responsibilities
- there was a lack of collaboration on strategic planning, even in the local authority area which had established formal partnership arrangements.

However, in spite of their over-riding monopoly, it seemed that local authorities were much more ready than they once might have been to consult with other sectors. They often chose not to compete with other provision and in many cases allowed other-sector providers to remain operating (frequently rent free) in school premises.

Parental reaction to the scheme

Almost all parents took advantage of the available vouchers; 91 per cent of those eligible used all the vouchers allocated to them. Parents warmly welcomed what they saw as free, guaranteed pre-school places for their children where they had some choice of provider. They were largely indifferent to the mechanism of the vouchers as a way of achieving this, and it was only when there were administrative hold-ups or complexities that they expressed direct views on the scheme, usually negative. Parents of children with special educational needs attributed both improved resources and the establishment of some local authority provision to the scheme (although the small numbers of respondents necessitate caution).

Evidence on the very high level of take-up and redemption of vouchers was confirmed by the very few parents revealed by the telephone survey as not using their vouches. Only 2 per cent of parents interviewed did not use vouchers and there were few obvious implications for policy in the data collected from them. All the non-users of the vouchers were using some kind of pre-school provision, and proportionately more of these were in the private sector. The reasons for non-use tended to be personal – either the child or a sibling was already using a provider not registered to redeem vouchers (sometimes a provider would be outwith the scheme's pilot area, or parents found it more convenient not to use the vouchers.

Parents found out about the scheme in a variety of ways – the media, particularly the television news, were very effective. Local authority meetings and postal campaigns supplemented the media coverage. Parents also found helplines useful, although there were some issues for which the information was, at best, sketchy.

Parents' satisfaction with the quality of provision

The study was not designed to explore the quality of pre-school provision, but data collected from parents suggested that they had three main concerns, i.e.:

- children's learning would be encouraged
- children would be helped to mix with other children
- there would be preparation for primary school.

The vast majority of parents expressed satisfaction with the provision they were using regardless of the type of provision. This suggested that variations in quality were not significant factors in parents' choice of provider. The emphasis found on the educational aspects of pre-school provision was a clear encouragement to the expansion of nursery classes (in preference to other forms, such as playgroups). Although it could be argued that the voucher scheme accelerated the expansion of local authority provision, there was earlier evidence of some decline in parental participation in voluntary sector playgroups and a tendency to change to local authority providers as places became available.

Comparing pre-school provision in the voucher pilot year with that offered previously, most parents reported that the experience of their 'voucher child' had been better than that of older siblings, especially in education-related aspects. Overall, few parents saw improvements in other aspects such as care or flexibility of hours. However, of parents using the private sector, 40 per cent recognised that the scheme has provided more flexibility of hours and enabled them to take advantage of provision which they would not otherwise have been able to afford.

There was clear evidence of increasing attention to quality assurance in the private and voluntary sectors, although this had started before the introduction of vouchers. Providers in theses sectors reported that their experience of completing the Profile of Education Provision (PEP) – required for registration and the subsequent HMI inspection – had had positive influences on their planning and delivery of the pre-school curriculum. However, the PEP and quality assurance initiatives had put particular burdens on the voluntary sector. The demands on playgroup committees were now greater and very different from those encountered in the past, while at the same time parental involvement in playgroups was declining.

Choice of provision

The voucher scheme was intended to give parents the opportunity to choose a pre-school provider and only 13 per cent of parents surveyed reported having no choice of provider. The two most important factors for parents in choosing provision were: how close the provider was to the home; and general convenience for the parents. Other major choice factors included:

- the good reputation of the provider (rated the most important by parents using private day-nursery provision)
- the child's future attendance at a primary school associated with the provider (especially in the local authority sector).

Most parents found choosing a relatively straightforward matter and were satisfied with the provider they had selected.

At the end of the pilot year, some parents expressed some concerns about choice in rural communities. They were anxious that local authorities might operate a 'two-tier service', using nursery nurses instead of nursery teachers in areas where the numbers of children were very small. Parents in rural areas had an overall preference for nursery classes (in a primary school), and showed an interest in using a registered primary school nursery for at least some sessions. Furthermore, they were also willing to transport their children considerable distances to access a nursery class.

Parents of children with special educational needs reported having little choice. Specialist local authority provision seemed to be the only satisfactory option. Other providers in the private and voluntary sectors were generally seen as lacking in expertise and resources or unlikely to cope with the special needs of these children.

The scheme was intended to allow parents to use multiple providers or to move between providers during the year. The data gathered revealed that they only rarely used more than one provider or moved their child from one provider to another. Parents indicated that this was because they preferred the provider they were using, but pressures from providers to hand in all their vouchers in advance may have been a barrier to this aspect of flexibility.

Parental involvement

The study found that parents' involvement (especially 'helping out') in pre-school provision had substantially declined in all sectors with the introduction of the voucher scheme. The decline was most marked in the voluntary sector, where casual assistance dropped from about 45 per cent to 13 per cent. Parents who did help at a nursery reported that their time spent there had increased by 50 per cent.

Two factors appear to have had an influence on the level of parental involvement. The first was a possible change in parental attitudes – in the voluntary sector parents may have viewed the introduction of voucher income as releasing them from the responsibility of support in a voluntary enterprise. The second factor was the emphasis on high educational standards. The PEP requirements and inspection process, which may have suggested that unqualified or untrained parental contributions were now inappropriate.

Children with special educational needs

About 6 per cent of parents thought their child needed special help with learning, considerably more that the usual estimates of about two per cent of the school population requiring a Record of Needs. A Record of Needs is rarely opened for a pre-school child because they may resolve their problems before or during the early years of primary school and be seen as no longer needing learning support.

Of the 20 children with special educational needs whose parents were interviewed, most had specific medical or physical problems. The majority attended local authority provision and had transport provided free by the local authority. Records of Needs were being, or had been, opened for ten of these children (about 1.5 per cent of all children surveyed).

Provision for children with special educational needs reflected that available in the school system generally, for example a variety of support staff, special equipment, therapies and case conferences. Parents' responses varied from very positive comments about dedicated staff, good facilities and integration with the mainstream to concerns about the general standards of local authority support – responses which might be expected from parents of school-age children.

There was no evidence of a shift of resources away from those with special needs and learning difficulties, in contrast to the experience of voucher schemes in secondary schools reported by other researchers (Ball and Gewirtz, 1996, and Gewirtz, 1996).

Conclusion

The introduction of a voucher scheme for pre-school education in Scotland can be seen as an innovative venture. Such schemes, though frequently discussed as a means of achieving educational change, have only infrequently been put into practice.

The evaluation of the pilot year of the Voucher Initiative revealed:

- an increase in the supply of pre-school provision –for the voucher experiment the main motivation was to increase the supply of pre-school provision to meet the already established demand. Provision increased in the pilot areas in Scotland, although only in the local authority sector. The voucher scheme gave better access to provision for children in geographically isolated areas and some degree of choice for children in urban areas. This increase in provision did not necessarily focus on the disadvantaged, in contrast to previous local authority policies

- differential effects on local authority and private provision – while local authority provision expanded there was little change in private provision although working parents in particular continued to value the flexibility of hours offered by the private sector. The voucher value was recognised as not covering the full cost of provision, particularly when capital costs were taken into account. This coupled with uncertainty about the continuing future of the scheme militated against expansion in the private sector. Parents using the private sector were glad to use their vouchers as a 'discount' against fees
- the vulnerability of the voluntary sector – the increasing emphasis on educational quality may have added to the existing trend for parents to choose local authority provision where this was, or became, available. It may become the common pattern for children to attend playgroup at the age of two and a half years or three years old until their pre-school year when they transfer to a local authority nursery school or class. The responsibilities of playgroup committees changed considerably when their provision entered the voucher initiative. The benefit in terms of extra finance inevitably varied with the number of vouchers which a playgroup was able to redeem
- positive impact on quality – those mechanisms in the scheme which were designed to ensure quality of provision (rather than vouchers *per se*) seemed to have had a positive impact on quality
- parental response – while parents were enthusiastic in their take-up of places, there was little evidence of them 'shopping around'. They were pleased to have a pre-school place for their child but unconcerned with the voucher mechanism. However, they seem to have reduced their involvement in what had become a much more formal area of the education system
- a change in perspectives on the scheme – there were differences in the extent to which the voucher scheme gained approval, or was regarded with contempt, by politicians and professionals. Nevertheless, it is fair to say

> that the negative reactions became more muted as the scheme progressed and that by the close of the pilot year the scheme was seen in a largely positive light by most of those involved.

The researchers remain neutral on this 'experiment' but it is clear that the existing system could not have achieved the expansion of good quality provision on the scale which was seen during this research without a radical stimulus of some description. While other means could have been used, vouchers have changed the course of pre-school provision in Scotland, giving pre-school education a prominence which it had never attained before.

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Part Two

Extending Provision

Chapter Six

Cost of Pre-School Education Provision

Paula Gilder, Paul Jardine and Sinead Guerin

If pre-school educational provision is to be extended, then policy makers require accurate information about the costs entailed. To meet this need, The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department Educational Research Unit commissioned, in September 1997, a study of the cost of pre-school education in Scotland. A detailed exploration of eleven pre-school establishments, drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors within both rural and urban areas, was undertaken to identify the range and variety of factors which affect the financial cost of provision across different establishments and sectors.

A postal survey was then sent to a sample of 20 per cent of education authority centres and 40 per cent of private and voluntary pre-school establishments, in anticipation of a differential response rate. The sample was drawn from The Scottish Office database of providers registered as eligible for Government grant for pre-school education, but did not include individual registered childminders or the one self-governing school. This stage provided information which enabled both intra- and inter-sector cost comparisons to be made.

The study identifies the significant cost drivers, giving some indication as to the ways in which the pattern of costs might change under a new funding regime. It also highlights particular areas where the pattern of costs cannot be explained without more detailed analysis within the private and voluntary sectors, and it touches on the potential to develop further our understanding of cost drivers in rural areas, possibly as part of a wider study in the future.

Education services for the pre-school child in Scotland are offered in the public, private and voluntary sectors. There is a great range of provision, but all of it is regulated, to a greater or less degree, under the Education (Scotland) Acts or under child care legislation. In practice, it is often difficult to draw a clear distinction between child care and education in the early-years services. For the purpose of the previous government's voucher system (an evaluation of which is reported in Chapter 5), certain providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors were registered as being eligible to receive Government grant for pre-school education (under the Education (Scotland) Act 1996). Registration was contingent upon successful assessment of the type and standard of services provided, the assessment being carried out by HM Inspectorate of Schools. The current research examines the cost of that provision, but only in centres which were registered.

A number of other factors impinge on this study. Pre-school provision is offered in a range of centres. These include education authority nursery schools or nursery classes attached to primary schools; local authority day care provision (under a number of different titles); independent schools registered with The Scottish Office under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980; playgroups and private day nurseries. (Centres within these last two groups are also registered for day-care purposes by their local authority under the Children Act 1989).

Pre-school education is not based upon a standardised timetable. While education authority nursery schools and classes generally offer approximately 12.5 hours a week in five morning or afternoon sessions, provision in other settings can be very different. This is especially so where pre-school education is provided alongside, or integrated with, day-care services over extended hours to fit in with the parents' working day – not all of this provision is 'education'.

Costs may also be treated differently by various providers. In some private nurseries and education authorities fairly sophisticated accounting systems are in place.

These may be absent from, for example, a voluntary playgroup .

It was also anticipated that the attribution of costs within different sectors would vary. This required the disaggregation of some budget headings and the identification of inputs which are not normally recorded as actual costs. For example, much pre-school provision is supported by volunteers (particularly in the voluntary sector) who may receive little or no remuneration. Also, premises may be provided by third parties without rental charges, for example, empty classrooms, church or community halls.

The costs of extra provision for children with special educational needs was another complicating factor which required the collection of information from individual centres in all sectors and from local authorities.

The research had to take account of all these contextual complicating factors in order to provide a robust, consistent and defensible approach to the accounting issues involved.

Objectives and approach to the research

The aim of this research study was to establish firm and comprehensive information on the current costs of pre-school educational provision for children in Scotland. The objectives also included the determination of the principal cost drivers. The first part of the study was a detailed review of eleven pre-school education centres, selected to cover the widest possible range of types of centre and location. The purpose of the case studies was to get a 'feel' for the information likely to be available from each provider, the current cost structure of the centres reviewed and the determinants of each element of their costs.

This enabled the team to identify key issues at an early stage. It also helped in the design of the questionnaires used for the main survey. These collected both financial information and information about each centre and the way it operates. Before reaching a picture of full costs, the main types of cost were analysed separately. These included:

- staff costs
- property costs
- other costs.

In each case the differences between sectors were examined and comparisons were made between small centres and larger ones and between those in rural, intermediate or urban areas.

Case studies

The main issues which were identified from the review of the case-study centres were concerned with:

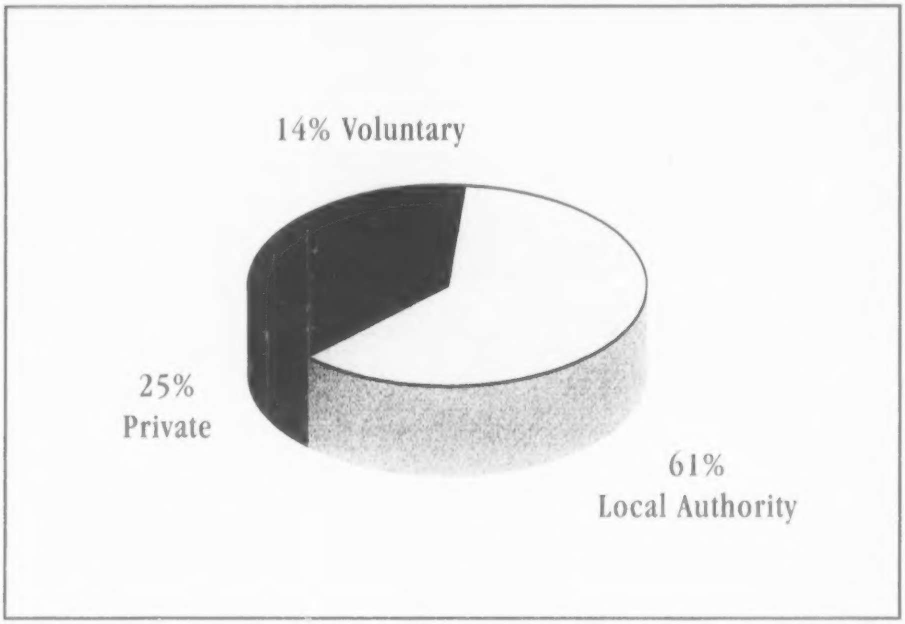
- the extent of the differences between centres
- the availability of information
- the use of marginal costing in some local authorities.

The research specification called for the determination of the full financial cost per child/place of part-time pre-school education provision, by sector, across Scotland. However, as a consequence of the wide range of different operating patterns identified at this stage, it appeared that a different measure of unit cost from that originally intended might be necessary. Therefore the questionnaires were designed so the number of child hours could be calculated as well as the number of sessions and the number of places

Two potential problems were identified concerning the availability of information. The first related to what information centres held and the second concerned the period to which costs related. Different accounting dates were less of a problem than the fact that most historical accounts covered, at least partly, the pre-voucher era (reported in Chapter 5). The solution adopted was to build up the major items of cost from current information. For example, in the case of staff costs, a snapshot approach was adopted with staffing numbers and pay levels at a given date being requested.

It also became apparent that many local authorities were adopting a marginal approach to costing the service, in particular where nursery classes were added to primary schools which had previously had spare capacity. Questions were therefore included about overall provision levels, and about internal cost allocation methods, to enable the team to compensate for this approach as far as possible, and to assess its likely future impact.

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS FROM PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND VOLUNTARY SECTORS



Respondents to the main survey

The response to the questionnaires is shown in Figure 1 above. The 207 local authority centres represent 16 per cent of the total number of local authority centres and the 135 private and voluntary centres represent 13 per cent of that total population. In addition, 27 of the 32 local authorities responded. Data used for the Grant-Aided Expenditure (GAE) was utilised and authorities were ranked using both the Additive Sparsity Indicator and the Multiple Sparsity Indicator into three divisions:

- rural (10 authorities)
- intermediate (11 authorities)
- urban (11 authorities).

The size of centres, as measured by the number of children attending the main session, varies considerably and there are significant differences between sectors.

TABLE 1: SIZE OF CENTRE MEASURED BY NUMBER OF CHILDREN ATTENDING MAIN SESSION

	Local Authority Centres		Private & Voluntary Centres	
Total no.children	**Number**	**% of total**	**Number**	**% of total**
0 - 20	28	13.6%	48	35.8%
21 - 40	52	25.2%	40	29.9%
41 - 60	37	18.0%	23	17.2%
61 - 80	37	18.0%	12	9.0%
81 - 100	18	8.7%	4	3.0%
101 - 120	15	7.3%	2	1.5%
121 - 140	12	5.8%	1	0.7%

There were 76 centres with 20 children or less – these centres were classified as small for the purposes of analysis. About half of these centres were in rural local authority areas.

Main findings

Range of operating pattern

There was a wide range of operating patterns in pre-school establishments. More than 80 per cent of the local authority centres and about 50 per cent of the private and voluntary sector centres covered by the analysis are open for between 38 and 40 weeks a year. Private and voluntary centres' opening periods cover a wider spread and a much higher proportion are open 50 weeks a year or more (22 per cent compared with 9 per cent in the local authority sector). Centres across all sectors vary in the total number of hours (covering both day care and education) they offer each week, ranging from less than four to more than 50.

This wide range of operating patterns confirmed that the detailed financial analysis would have to compare costs per child hour rather than by session or by place. The number of child hours per centre was calculated based on the actual number of children attending each session in the snapshot week, the length of each session and the number of weeks the centre operates in a year. (Whilst it is possible to derive the cost of a place from costs per child hour, this involves more than simply 'grossing up'.)

Profile of children who attend pre-school education centres

Do all pre-school establishments provide for similar groups of children? From our research it emerged that local authority and private/voluntary sector centres provided for a significantly different profile of children as shown in Table 2.

Respondents were asked to define as having special educational needs (SEN) any children whose needs were such that they resulted in extra costs being incurred. The total number of children identified as having special needs using this definition was 381, of whom 360 were in local authority centres.

TABLE 2: PROFILE OF CHILDREN WHO ATTEND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION CENTRES

	Local Authority Centres	**Private/Voluntary Centres**
Number of children	13061	5293
% in pre-school year	75%	50%
% with SEN (see below)	2.8%	0.4%

Overall levels of provision

Is there spare capacity which could be better utilised? To assess this, centres were asked to compare actual numbers of children attending the centre with its capacity. However, many centres, particularly in the voluntary sector, operate in premises such as village halls, which could accommodate many more children. Capacity is therefore constrained in those cases only by staffing levels, which in turn could be increased if the number of children warranted it. It was therefore not possible to quantify any under-use of existing capacity.

Questions were also addressed to local authorities about the numbers of pre-school children in their area with places and about those without access to any provision:

- five authorities indicated that there was no shortfall in provision, that is that all pre-school children who required a place had one

- six did not know whether or not there was a shortfall
- 16 were aware of shortages.

Eleven of these 16 authorities were able to quantify the shortfall and, for them, it amounted to an average of 5 per cent of the number of pre-school-age children in those areas, with a range of 1 to 16 per cent. There was no discernible pattern in reported shortfalls.

Staff costs

Did staff costs vary across the different sectors? To assess this we defined staff costs as salaries, wages, employment overheads, training and staff absence cover related to all staff who are dedicated to each centre, and to appropriate proportions of associated staff. For example, we apportioned part of the salary of primary school headteachers or janitors, whose work load includes a pre-school centre as part of their wider remit, as a cost to the centre. The average staff cost incurred by centres was £1.65 per child hour. This ranged from £2.22 per child hour in local authority centres, through £1.20 in voluntary centres to £0.79 per child hour in private centres. In addition local authorities provide centrally for some absence cover, training and development. This amounts to an average of £17.93 a year for each child in a local authority centre. A small amount of the training figure may relate to staff from the private or voluntary sector whose training is being provided or funded by the authority. To that extent the figure above may be slightly overstated.

Including these central costs, and making the necessary assumptions to convert the costs above to annual equivalents, the average staff cost per child per year is £836.16. This ranges from £1128.08 in local authority centres, through £598.75 in voluntary centres to £397.30 in private centres.

Reasons for these variations include:

- use of volunteer staff – the private and voluntary sectors sometimes rely on unpaid volunteer staff to provide cover for staff absences. The centres identified about 510 sessions a month of free cover, about 6.5 per cent of child hours in voluntary centres and 0.5 per cent of child hours in private centres. (Volunteers are used on a regular basis by 36 per cent of the centres in the private and voluntary sector to maintain the staffing ratio)

- treatment of private sector 'drawings' – owners may be taking 'drawings' from profits rather than paying themselves a salary, which do not then appear as staff costs
- use of qualified teachers and salaried staff – the proportion of salary and wages costs accounted for by qualified teachers is 29 per cent in local authority centres, 14.7 per cent in private centres and 2.7 per cent in voluntary centres. (In local authority centres 97 per cent of the salary/wage bill for dedicated centre staff is accounted for by salaried staff, compared with 76 per cent in the private and voluntary sector centres)
- rate of pay – almost all hourly paid local authority staff are paid between £4 and £6 an hour. In the private and voluntary sector centres, although more than half the staff receive between £4 and £6 an hour, 25.6 per cent of qualified staff and 35.9 per cent of unqualified staff receive less. 10.3 per cent of qualified staff and 14.1 per cent of unqualified staff receive £3 an hour or less. (Local authority salaried staff are also paid significantly more than apparently equivalent staff in the private and voluntary sector, although in the private and voluntary sector a very large range of salary levels was reported, for example from £3,360 to £21,912 p.a. for managerial staff – compared with a local authority average of £27,518).

Local authority centres typically work to a target child:staff ratio of 10:1 for pre-school children whereas private and voluntary centres typically work to a target child:staff ratio of 8:1 for pre-school children and an average target ratio across all ages of 6:1. Thus, although staff costs are higher per member of staff in the local authority centres, the effect of this on the cost per child is reduced by lower staffing levels.

Property costs

Identifying property costs can be problematic. In this research, we defined them as rent, loan charges and other property-related costs such as buildings and grounds maintenance, rates and/or council taxes, water, heating, lighting, telephone, cleaning, caretaking, security and insurance. The reported average property cost incurred by centres was £0.45 per child hour. This ranged from £0.66 per child hour in local authority centres, through £0.16 in voluntary centres to £0.12 per child hour in private centres. In addition local authorities provide centrally for capital charges and some other property costs amounting to an average of £58.49 a year for each child in a local authority centre.

Thirteen independent centres (accounting for approximately 9 per cent of the total number of child hours provided in this sector) appear to use their property at no cost. Property costs in this sector will, to that extent, not reflect the true economic cost.

For some nursery classes local authorities returned a total premises cost figure for the whole school. Where school-roll figures were also given, the nursery-class share of the total cost was calculated on the basis of the number of children. Otherwise the information was treated as unavailable.

In cases where authorities gave figures as allocated directly to a nursery class, these figures have been used. However, sometimes they have clearly treated a nursery class as a marginal addition to the primary school and have allocated to it only additional costs. To that extent property costs for the local authority sector will also be less than the true economic cost. Also, costs are often allocated to centres by education authorities as a fixed amount per school, obscuring any variations between rural/urban and large/small centres.

Including the local authority central costs, and converting the costs above to annual equivalents, the average property cost per child per year is £259.98. This ranges from £389.09 in local authority centres, through £81.45 in voluntary centres to £58.30 in private centres.

Other costs

Although staff- and property-related costs are the two most significant items in providing pre-school education, there are other costs. These include expenditure by centres on meals, milk, snacks, equipment, materials and transport. The average of these costs incurred by centres was £0.16 per child hour. This ranged from £0.38 per child hour in voluntary centres, through £0.16 in private centres to £0.13 per child hour in local authority centres.

Local authorities incurred additional central costs such as administrative costs (relating to the servicing of committees, production of papers for council members etc.), specialist services for children with special educational needs, support services, home-to-school transport, equipment and materials, contingencies and grants, both to the Scottish Pre-School Play Association (SPPA) and to individual playgroups. In many cases the information did not allow for the separation of costs – for example support services, which should be treated as an overhead on local authority centres, could not be distinguished from grants, which should not be so treated. However, based on those authorities who gave sufficient detail, only a small proportion seems to be allocated to grants. Other central costs have therefore all been treated as relating to the authorities' own centres. Some of these costs (for example administrative expenses) are fixed rather than variable (that is, are inherent in the provision of the education service) and there is an inevitable artificiality about expressing them on a per capita basis.

Including these central costs, which total £144.60 per year for each child in a local authority centre, and converting the costs above to annual equivalents, the average cost per child per year is £165.08. This ranges from £209.10 in local authority centres, through £188.00 in voluntary centres to £81.50 in private centres.

Overview of costs

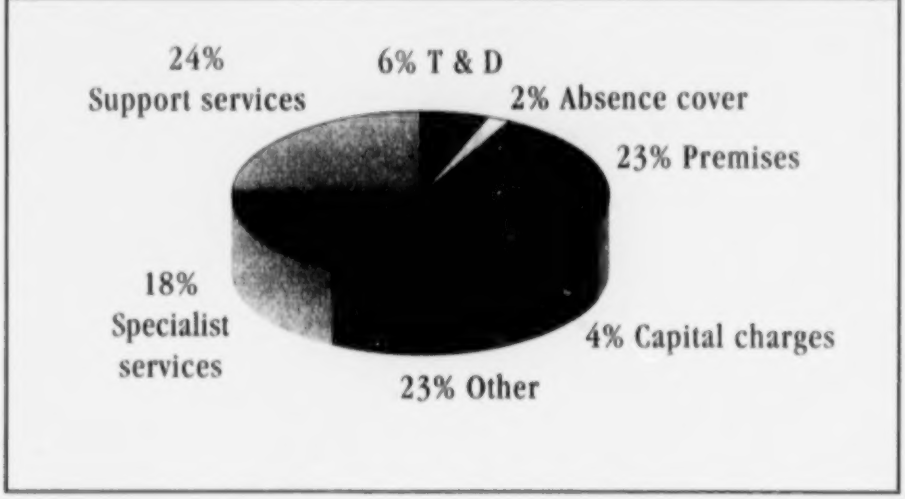
The costs per child hour incurred by centres themselves are shown below.

TABLE 3: COSTS PER CHILD HOUR INCURRED PER CENTRE

	Local Authority	**Private**	**Voluntary**	**All centres (average)**
	£ per ch.hr.	**£ per ch.hr**	**£ per ch.hr.**	**£ per ch.hr.**
Total staff costs	2.22	0.79	1.20	1.65
Total property costs	0.66	0.12	0.16	0.45
Total other costs	0.13	0.16	0.38	0.1
TOTAL	3.01	1.07	1.74	2.25

In addition each local authority accounts for some costs centrally and these, expressed as an annual amount per child in a local authority centre, are shown below.

FIGURE 2: ALLOCATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CENTRALLY HELD FUNDS PER CHILD



How much, then, does it cost per child for a year of pre-school education: this was the question which we posed. We suggest that, assuming an average attendance per child of 500 hours, based on attendance for 40 weeks per year for 12.5 hours a week, the current annual costs of provision per child are as shown in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4: CURRENT ANNUAL COSTS OF PROVISION PER CHILD

	Local Authority	Private	Voluntary	All centres (average)
	£p.a.per child	£p.a.per child	£p.a.per child	£p.a.per child
Total staff costs	1128.08	397.30	598.75	836.16
Tot.property cost	389.09	58.30	81.45	259.98
Total other costs	209.10	81.50	188.00	165.08
TOTAL	1726.27	537.10	868.20	1261.22

From this it appears that centres in the private sector cost much less than those in the voluntary sector. In case this resulted from the non-disclosure of some private sector costs, the team looked at total costs compared with total income to identify any apparently high surpluses. However, in many cases the only income figures given were historical figures and not comparable with the cost figures used. Other possible explanations for the relativities in cost across the sectors would require further research.

The annual costs above can be further analysed to distinguish between small centres and others as shown below. However, it should be borne in mind that the addition for local authority central costs is at a uniform rate across all types of centre.

TABLE 5: ANNUAL COST PER CHILD (NB SMALL IS DEFINED AS 20 CHILDREN OR LESS)

	£ p.a. per child
Small local authority centres	2752.31
Small private and voluntary centres	1029.96
Average, small centres	**1404.43**
Other local authority centres	1659.20
Other private and voluntary centres	537.70
Average, other centres	**1239.77**

Clearly therefore, across all sectors, small centres (defined as having 20 children or less) have higher unit costs than larger ones. A similar comparison of the costs of centres in rural, intermediate and urban local authority areas is shown overleaf.

TABLE 6: COMPARISON OF COSTS IN RURAL, INTERMEDIATE AND URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITY CENTRES.

	£ p.a. per child
Rural local authority centres	2386.47
Rural private and voluntary centres	481.36
Average, rural centres	**1422.31**
Intermediate local authority centres	1858.83
Intermediate private and voluntary centres	694.23
Average, intermediate centres	**1530.54**
Urban local auuthority centres	1462.54
Urban private centres	627.22
Average, urban centres	**1120.05**

A surprising feature is the apparently lower cost of private and voluntary centres in rural areas compared with urban and intermediate areas. This may indicate that the classification according to rural, intermediate and urban, by whole local authority area, is too broad. It may also reflect the distorting effect of the various 'free goods' referred to earlier from which the private and voluntary sectors benefit.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to provide 'firm and comprehensive' information on costs. Given the contextual implications (referred to in the background section) and the different levels of response (by sector) to the survey, some caution must be used in generalising from the overview of the costs per child. The relativities per sector are perhaps as important as the absolute figures in each sector. Whether these relativities are sufficiently robust to justify a differentiated approach to the government funding of pre-school education at the present time is, however, open to question.

It was not within the scope of this study to assess the quality of different types of provision but there are clearly cost drivers, relating to quality, at work. The proportion of qualified teachers employed, which many commentators would associate with quality, is one of the main drivers. The cost variations would be reduced if there was more standardisation, particularly of staffing ratios and pay rates; but, if reducing staffing standards in any sector were not considered acceptable, any move towards harmonisation of standards would lead to increases in costs overall.

Is there room for providers to control cost variations? We would argue that, because a high proportion of costs are fixed, at least in the short term, the ability of providers to adjust their costs in response to any change in provision levels is limited. This is particularly the case for local authorities because of the high proportion of salaried staff. For example, if the number of weeks of pre-school educational provision in any centre was reduced from the typical 40 weeks used to calculate the figures above to, for instance, 33 weeks, this would represent a reduction of 17.5 per cent in the relevant time period. Local authorities' immediate scope to reduce costs would be a little less than 1 per cent and that of the private and voluntary sectors would, on average, be about 6 per cent.

If local authorities enter into more partnership arrangements with private and voluntary providers there may be a need for them to incur different sorts of costs either to help establish new providers, or to develop and support those which already exist. There are already examples of local authority teaching staff visiting private and voluntary centres, but completely new and as yet uncosted forms of partnership-working may develop.

There is evidence that although there is spare capacity in some existing provision, there are also a significant number of communities and therefore children where there is no provision (as at March 1998, the time of this analysis). Establishing provision in these areas will involve start-up and development costs and, particularly where small centres are required, such provision is also likely to incur higher than average on-going costs.

Rural areas

Although this study confirms that units costs are generally higher in small centres, it does not provide sufficient information to quantify the impact of that on each council with a large rural area, which could be expected to need a higher than usual proportion of small centres. This is partly because the study uses a broad definition of 'rural', but is mainly because in remote areas costs depend on:

- the pattern of provision, or otherwise, which exists
- the scope in each area to use existing facilities to expand or develop services
- the willingness and ability of local communities or businesses to participate.

Any further study into the costs of rural provision would need to use a more focused definition of 'rural' and, at the same time, consider settlement and provision patterns, as well as the potential for innovative ways of operating.

Part Two

Extending Provision

Chapter Seven

Changing Supply and Demand

Edith McDowall, DTZ Pieda

Pre-school education in Scotland is not a statutory service and there is a range of provision across the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is an area which has experienced and continues to experience significant change, both as a result of the funding regime introduced by the previous government and as a consequence of the current government's commitment to make available a part-time pre-school education place to every child in their pre-school year by winter 1998/99, with staged targets for ante-pre-school-year children thereafter. Given this diversity, there was a need for accurate information to provide a baseline against which the effects of Scottish Office initiatives could be assessed – hence the current study.

DTZ Pieda Consulting was appointed by The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department Educational Research Unit to undertake a study of the demand for and supply of pre-school education in Scotland over the period January 1996 – January 1998. The main aim of the research was to establish reliable and comprehensive information for Scotland as a whole and each individual local authority, on the supply of, and demand for, pre-school education provision.

Pre-school education is available from a range of different providers including local authority nursery schools and classes, independent school nurseries, private nurseries, voluntary providers, local authority non-school centres and child minders. Given the range of provider types, it is important to acknowledge that pre-school education is delivered in a variety of 'packages' with differences in patterns of provision both within and between sectors. These differences, which include the number of sessions available per week, session length and part-time/ full-time provision, introduced complications in selecting the most appropriate units of supply and demand measurement for the study. The approach taken involved assessing demand in terms of the number of children seeking places and supply in terms of the number of places available.

The research sought to address three main questions:

- what is the demand for pre-school education at the local authority level in Scotland?
- what is the supply of pre-school education within local authority areas in Scotland?
- what approaches will local authorities use to meet the government's commitment to providing a part-time place for all children in their pre-school year?

Methodology and data sources

Demand

The demand for pre-school education was derived first in terms of the size of the relevant population group as shown in local authority population estimates prepared by the Registrar General. Information on the number of children attending was also obtained from a postal survey of all local authorities undertaken during February/March 1998. Responses were received from 31 of the 32 local authorities.

Supply

Information on the supply of pre-school education was derived from two main sources:

- the Scottish Office School Census which is undertaken in September of each year and provides information on all nursery schools and classes in the local authority and independent sectors

- a postal survey of all private, voluntary and other providers who were registered with The Scottish Office as being eligible for pre-school education grant at November 1997. The survey was undertaken in February/March 1998 with questionnaires sent to the population of registered providers.

A total of 1,140 questionnaires were issued and 763 responses received. This is a response rate of 67 per cent.

Future provision

To determine the approaches being used by local authorities to meet the government's commitment, a series of case studies were undertaken. The following six local authorities were selected, utilising the same threefold classification as Gilder *et al.* (Chapter 6), as shown below:

◆ Urban Authorities:	Aberdeen City and Dundee
◆ Intermediate Authorities:	Fife and North Ayrshire
◆ Rural Authorities:	Highland and the Western Isles.

The case studies were undertaken during June 1998 and included in-depth interviews with the local authority and a sample of other providers in the area.

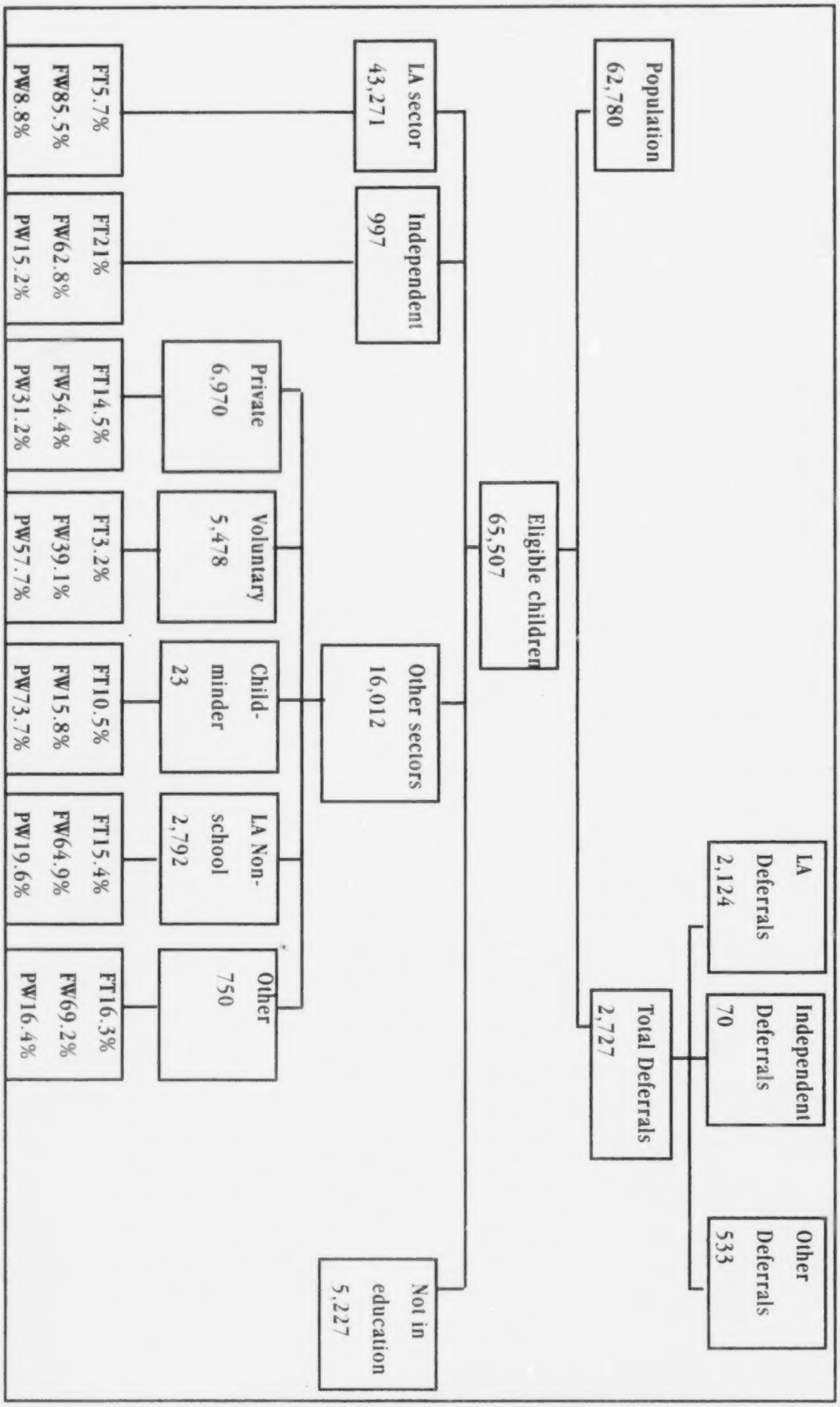
Key findings

Demand and supply interaction

The interaction of demand and supply of pre-school education is shown in Figure 1 (see below). The top part of the Figure considers demand and the bottom part considers supply. The key results are:

- in school year 1997/8 there were 65,507 children eligible for pre-school education in Scotland – 62,780 children in the pre-school year and 2,727 children whose entrance to school had been deferred by one year
- the majority of children (60,280 or 92 per cent of eligible children) attended pre-school education in 1997/8 with 5,227 children not attending any form of education
- local authority nursery schools and classes were the main forms of provision accounting for 72 per cent of children

FIGURE 1: INTERACTION OF DEMAND AND SUPPLY, SCOTLAND


Population
62,780
Eligible children
65,507
Total Deferrals
2,727
LA
Deferrals
2,124
Independent
Deferrals
70
Other
Deferrals
533
LA sector
43,271
Independent
997
Other sectors
16,012
Not in
education
5,227
Private
6,970
Voluntary
5,478
Child-
minder
23
LA Non-
school
2,792
Other
750
FT5.7%
FW85.5%
PW8.8%
FT21%
FW62.8%
PW15.2%
FT14.5%
FW54.4%
PW31.2%
FT3.2%
FW39.1%
PW57.7%
FT10.5%
FW15.8%
PW73.7%
FT15.4%
FW64.9%
PW19.6%
FT16.3%
FW69.2%
PW16.4%

- private nurseries and the voluntary sector accounted for 12 per cent and 9 per cent of children respectively.

Figure 1 also shows the pattern of attendance by children in the various provider types. The methods of attendance are defined as:

- Full-time – children attending pre-school education all day, every day
- Full-week – children attending pre-school education for at least five sessions per week. This could be every morning, every afternoon or a combination of morning and afternoons which provide at least five sessions of pre-school education
- Part-week – children attending pre-school education for less than five sessions per week.

There is substantial variation in the pattern of attendance across the different provider types, for example:

- local authority nursery schools and classes have over 85 per cent of children attending for at least five sessions per week with only 9 per cent attending on a part-week basis. However, there is limited full-time attendance (9 per cent) in the local authority sector
- independent school nurseries have almost 22 per cent of children attending on a full-time basis
- the majority (54 per cent) of children in the private sector attend on a full-week basis, i.e. at least five sessions per week. This is a much lower percentage than in the local authority sector
- the voluntary sector is dominated by part-week provision (58 per cent).

Trends in local authority provision

The capacity of local authority nursery schools and classes and the number of children attending over 1995-97 is shown in Table 1 (below). The capacity of the nursery schools and classes is measured by the number of children that can be accommodated at any one time.

The key findings from Table 1 are:

- over 1995-97 the capacity of local authority nursery schools and classes in Scotland has increased by almost 18 per cent to 37,314
- East Dunbartonshire, Argyll and Bute, Highland, North Ayrshire and Scot-

TABLE 1: CAPACITY AND NUMBER OF PUPILS AT LOCAL AUTHORITY NURSERY SCHOOLS AND CLASSES

	Capacity (1)			Number of Pupils		
	1995	**1996**	**1997**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**
Aberdeen City	1,651	1,734	1,954	2,272	2,294	2,346
Aberdeenshire	1,083	1,140	1,520	2,074	2,198	2,347
Angus	606	646	790	930	1,055	1,205
Argyll and Bute	84	106	238	166	196	336
Clackmannanshire	390	390	420	680	657	664
Dumfries & Galloway	750	735	1,025	1,537	1,599	1,687
Dundee City	1,655	1,674	1,590	2,193	2,238	2,041
East Ayrshire	905	875	1,054	1,579	1,418	1,511
East Dunbartonshire	90	90	624	164	154	848
East Lothian	835	820	903	1,255	1,331	1,397
East Renfrewshire	330	436	520	579	730	829
Edinburgh City	3,904	3,821	3,963	5,117	4,888	4,775
Falkirk	970	990	1,022	1,688	1,537	1,606
Fife	3,299	3,295	3,254	4,408	4,466	4,386
Glasgow City	5,505	5,350	5,250	8,556	8,336	7,697
Highland	553	805	1,490	864	1,070	1,645
Inverclyde	360	360	470	617	598	665
Midlothian	760	780	810	1,188	1,159	1,106
Moray	500	440	520	729	720	721
North Ayrshire	305	668	733	476	861	973
North Lanarkshire	1,108	1,125	1,550	2,077	2,005	2,615
Orkney Islands	160	218	220	214	278	269
Perth and Kinross	847	1,014	960	1,168	1,358	1,375
Renfrewshire	854	972	934	1,481	1,500	1,420
Scottish Borders	372	358	853	574	584	923
Shetland Islands	216	215	220	300	302	279
South Ayrshire	380	539	659	585	910	1,010
South Lanarkshire	653	681	983	1,194	1,202	1,816
Stirling	539	539	630	844	881	904
West Dunbartonshire	720	720	740	1,337	1,314	1,305
West Lothian	1,331	1,310	1,395	2,174	2,170	2,182
Western Isles			20			26
Total	**31,715**	**32,846**	**37,314**	**49,020**	**50,109**	**52,919**

Notes: Capacity is defined to be the number of children which can be accommodated at any one time. If a class has two sessions, its capacity is effectively doubled, but this is not picked up in the Table.

tish Borders have experienced significant increases in capacity

- Glasgow City, Dundee City and Fife have experienced slight reductions in capacity
- the number of children attending has increased by 8 per cent to 52,919 children over 1995-97, with most of the increase occurring over 1996-97
- capacity has grown more quickly than the number of children attending.

Over 1995-97, 19 local authorities have noticed an increased demand for their pre-school places, both for pre-school year and ante pre-school year places. We suggest there is a connection between supply and demand. Local authorities respondents reported that parents had responded to changes in the supply of place, thus stimulating demand. When there were fewer places, more parents did not apply or possibly did not think it was worth applying as their chance of being allocated a place was slight. As supply increased, the possibility of being allocated a place resulted in more parents applying.

The local authorities surveyed considered that parents' awareness of pre-school education has increased and the voucher scheme (reported in chapter 5) was mentioned as raising people's expectations of a pre-school education place, and in some cases of a local authority nursery place. Table 2 shows that just under half of Scottish local authorities felt that their current level of pre-school provision met parents' needs. However, the majority of local authorities were able to suggest developments which they felt parents wanted from nursery provision such as education for younger children and wrap-around care.

TABLE 2: LOCAL AUTHORITY ASSESSMENT OF SUPPLY/DEMAND

Issue	Number(1)
Level of provision currently adequate	14
Unmet demand for...	
extended provision	16
more flexible care	9
places for ante-pre-school children	4
rural provision	3
places linked to the primary school	1
Base	31

NOTES TO TABLE 2

[1] local authorities could give more than one answer, so responses sum to more than 31

NB Some local authorities which answered that their current provision was appropriate also mentioned some areas of unmet demands.

Pre-school year children

Supply of and demand for pre-school education are not static and this research identified changes in each. In Scotland, there was a marked shift in the age distribution of nursery children between 1996 and 1997. In 1996 74 per cent of children in local authority nursery provision were in their pre-school year. By 1997 the proportion had increased to 82 per cent. This is shown in Table 3. Eleven local authorities had more than 90 per cent of places taken by pre-school year children in 1997; only two local authorities had less than 70 per cent of places taken by pre-school year children.

TABLE 3: PROPORTION OF NURSERY CHILDREN IN THEIR PRE-SCHOOL YEAR, 1996, 1997 (PER CENT OF ALL PUPILS)

Local authority	1996	1997	Local authority	1996	1997
Aberdeen City	78	78	Inverclyde	69	77
Aberdeenshire	93	93	Midlothian	76	77
Angus	85	98	Moray	90	94
Argyll & Bute	69	84	North Ayrshire	80	97
Clackmannanshire	78	81	North Lanarkshire	66	74
Dumfries & Galloway	86	93	Orkney Islands	82	94
Dundee City	66	73	Perth & Kinross	74	86
East Ayrshire	70	82	Renfrewshire	75	86
East Dunbartonshire	63	79	South Ayrshire	80	93
East Lothian	74	73	South Lanarkshire	72	78
East Renfrewshire	67	83	Scottish Borders	94	99
Edinburgh, City of	71	76	Shetland Islands	75	83
Falkirk	83	97	Stirling	75	83
Fife	80	90	W Dunbartonshire	66	61
Glasgow City	61	68	West Lothian	74	87
Highland	88	98	Western Isles	*	*
Total				**74**	**82**

* Figures not available for Western Isles

Source: Source: Scottish Office School Census (figures reflect the position in September of each year)

Trends in independent pre-school education provision

Table 4 shows the number of providers, capacity and children attending pre-school education in the independent sector over 1996-97, i.e. pre-school provision attached to independent schools. For Scotland as a whole, the capacity of the independent school sector was 1,594 places in 1997 – an increase of 4.8 per cent since 1996. More than 50 per cent of the capacity in the independent school sector was available in Edinburgh City and Glasgow City.

TABLE 4: PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

	1996			1997			
Local Authority	**No. Providers**	**Capacity**	**Pupils**	**No. providers**	**Capacity**	**Pupils**	**Pre-school year only**
Aberdeen City	5	164	193	5	163	270	123
Aberdeenshire	1	7	6	1	10	22	21
Angus	1	36	50	1	38	50	26
Argyll & Bute	2	90	71	2	95	75	32
Dumfries & Galloway	1	11	11	-	-	-	-
E. Dunbartonshire	2	121	114	2	118	130	75
E. Lothian	1	18	10	1	20	15	12
E. Renfrewshire	1	24	24	1	24	20	19
Edinburgh City	10	530	479	10	521	514	329
Fife	3	54	38	3	56	32	17
Glasgow City	7	277	242	8	321	286	221
Moray	2	36	40	2	76	75	34
Perth & Kinross	2	52	93	2	52	77	33
S. Ayrshire	1	50	39	1	50	37	28
Stirling	1	50	34	1	50	35	27
Total	**40**	**1,520**	**1,444**	**40**	**1,594**	**1,638**	**997**

Source: Scottish Office School Census (figures reflect the position in September of each year)

A total of 1,638 children received pre-school education in the independent sector in 1997-99, 7 of these children were in their pre-school year.

Trends in non-school pre-school education provision

The non-school sector comprises private nurseries and private nursery schools, playgroups/voluntary providers, child minders, local authority non-school centres (e.g. day centres) and other providers (e.g. workplace nurseries). In 1997/8 the capacity of the non-school sector was 25,096 places. This is shown in Table 5. This represents an increase in places of 15 per cent over 1995/96 to 1997/98 with the majority of the increase occurring over 1996/7-1997/8.

TABLE 5: PLACES AVAILABLE FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE NON-SCHOOL SECTOR, 1997/8

	Private nursery/priv. nursery school	**Playgroup or voluntary**	**Childminder**	**LA non school centre**	**Other**	**Total**	**Average capacity**
Aberdeen City	474	221	0	61	236	993	22
Aberdeenshire	515	1600	0	27	0	2142	23
Angus	181	230	0	26	43	480	24
Argyll & Bute	129	657	9	50	58	904	17
Clackmannanshire	97	32	8	16	0	153	19
Dumfries & Galloway	48	195	0	0	23	267	18
Dundee City	415	64	0	255	0	734	25
East Ayrshire	47	178	0	43	0	268	16
East Dunbartonshire	350	545	0	0	0	895	24
East Lothian	71	48	0	0	0	119	24
East Renfrewshire	245	225	0	0	0	470	31
Edinburgh City	1421	382	0	28	143	1974	20
Falkirk	117	38	0	242	0	397	25
Fife	111	78	0	20	0	208	16
Glasgow	1087	527	0	670	261	2544	23
Highland	425	1061	0	0	66	1553	20
Inverclyde	103	206	0	303	39	650	26
Midlothian	86	68	0	0	0	155	17
Moray	71	628	0	19	139	858	21
North Ayrshire	310	351	0	169	94	924	24
North Lanarkshire	587	677	0	531	0	1796	26
Orkney Islands	16	32	0	0	0	48	12
Perth & Kinross	423	298	0	0	0	720	19
Renfrewshire	298	290	0	358	131	1076	29
Scottish Borders	283	183	0	0	0	467	18
Shetland Islands	12	147	0	0	30	189	21
South Ayrshire	115	284	0	24	0	423	20
South Lanarkshire	606	1176	0	393	68	2243	23
Stirling	142	252	0	0	41	435	20
West Dunbartonshire	148	36	0	206	0	390	24
West Lothian	150	0	0	0	0	150	50
Western Isles	0	438	19	0	15	472	17
Total	**9084**	**11148**	**36**	**3441**	**1387**	**25096**	**22**

Source: DTZ Pieda Consulting Survey

Future provision

In school year 1998/9 a total of £75.6 million of public expenditure was available for pre-school education. Grant funding was available to support pre-school provision by local authorities and to enable authorities to purchase places in the private and voluntary sectors. A part-time place is defined to be at least 412.5 hours of pre-school education over the school year.

Grant for places commissioned by local authorities in private and voluntary centres which are registered for pre-school education were paid to the local authority at a rate per part-time place of £1,140 over the year. The rate at which the grant was paid by the local authority to the private or voluntary provider was negotiated between the parties involved. However, it was anticipated that authorities would not be able to purchase a part-time place which met the required quality standards for less than £850 per year.

At the time of the case studies (June 1998), local authorities were considering their strategy for managing the new funding (this is discussed further in Chapter 8). Three alternative strategies emerged:

- all funded places to be provided in local authority facilities
- non-local authority places to be funded only in specified circumstances, e.g. where there is non-local authority provision
- funding to be available to all registered providers.

We now consider each in turn.

All funded places in the local authority sector

In one case-study area there were sufficient places in the local authority nurseries to accommodate all pre-school year children. The local authority was unwilling to provide funding for parents using mixed care and education facilities in the private sector, although it recognised that many parents require access to high quality day-care and education for their children. Hence, it was developing pilot projects which would provide both education and wrap-around care with parents paying for the wrap-around care.

Non-local authority providers in this area were concerned that working parents using private facilities would be disadvantaged as they would have to pay the full cost of the provision. In the longer term non-local authority providers were also concerned about the impact on their businesses as they expected the local authority to expand its own day-care and other services to the detriment of the private sector.

Bulk of funding directed to local authority facilities

A number of local authorities in the case-study areas were considering this option where local authority nurseries were used first with other sectors providing pre-school education when there was an overspill of unmet needs or no local authority facilities. This option was designed to ensure that the local authority nurseries were used efficiently, but it recognised that in certain circumstances, access to pre-school education in non-local authority facilities was required. This was mainly when a parent required combined education and care which the local authority could not provide.

Funding to be available to all registered providers

Some local authorities were adopting systems largely based on the principles which underpinned the Pilot Voucher Scheme (reported in Chapter 5) where parents could place their child with any registered provider eligible for receipt of vouchers. Providers would receive payment for all pre-school year children on their register, although most local authorities intended to pay less than the grant value for places. Some of the local authorities were attaching conditions to funding to ensure that quality standards were met – e.g. by specifying the number of days of training for nursery staff.

Views on partnerships

Local authorities found that the new funding mechanism provided them with the resources to implement a pre-school strategy. The strategies generally involved the local authority as the main provider of pre-school education to four year olds, leaving other sectors to provide wrap-around care and services for three year olds. In authorities with rural areas, however, the strategy tended to rely on the voluntary sector as the main provider of education provision in remote and sparsely populated areas. Here again, Glider *et al.*'s comments (Chapter 6) on the cost of pre-school education in rural areas by provider are instructive.

Non-local authority providers viewed the partnership approach quite differently. To them partnership was restricted to the agreement they had with the local authority with many feeling that they had no input into the development of the agreement. The local authorities were perceived to be dictating the terms and conditions and the non-local authority providers could either accept the conditions or not enter into partnerships.

Ante pre-school year

The current provision for ante-pre-school-year children is quite limited with only four local authorities having sufficient places to provide for more than half of the ante-pre-school-year children. Generally these children were allocated or offered places only when the part-time and full-time needs of the pre-school year children have been met. Over the next two years however, 17 authorities expect the demand for ante pre-school year children to increase and 18 authorities expect the supply of places to increase. However, there was limited evidence that there would be increased funding or grants to the non-local authority sector to provide additional places.

Conclusions

There is a general balance between the demand for and supply of pre-school education across Scotland as a whole. Some 92 per cent of pre-school-year children in 1997/8 were receiving pre-school education with the majority accommodated in local authority nursery schools and classes. Both the capacity and number of children attending pre-school education has increased over 1995/6 to 1997/8 and the increases have occurred in both the local authority and non-local authority sectors.

Local authorities have been given the role of planning, co-ordinating and delivering the government's commitment to pre-school education, but the decision to partner other service providers is very much dependent upon the characteristics of provision within each authority. The options available include funding all places in local authority facilities, funding non-local authorities in specific circumstances only (e.g. when care is also required or there is no local authority provision), and funding all registered providers as the demand arises.

Many local authorities recognise the need for wrap-around care and are developing pilot programmes to provide this service within the local authority sector.

While the local authorities found that the new funding mechanisms provided them with the resources to implement a pre-school strategy, the non-local authority providers were more cautious about the implementation of the new funding mechanism and the effects it may have on the private and voluntary sectors.

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Part Three

Ways Forward?

Chapter Eight

Review of Partnership in Pre-school Education

Ivan Broussine, Classic Concepts

The current expansion of pre-school education in Scotland is based upon the concept of partnership between local authorities and private and voluntary providers. In October 1998 The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department commissioned Classic Concepts to review theses Pre-school Partnerships. The researcher's task was to assess the range of partnerships; the volume, type and location of pre-school education places supported by Scottish Office funds, disbursed by local authorities to the private and voluntary sectors; and look at the perceptions of the various stakeholders towards partnership.

Education and childcare lie at the heart of the Scottish Executive's agenda for children's well-being and achievement, and have an important role in their parents' social and economic fulfilment. A commitment to universal provision of high quality, part-time pre-school education is part of a wider strategy to enhance and extend educational provision, while also supporting parents currently in work and encouraging 'returners'. In order to achieve this, local authorities have been set targets to provide pre-school education for all four year olds by the winter of 1998, and for all three year olds (in their ante-pre-school year) by 2002. However, successful delivery of pre-school education is dependent upon effective planning and co-ordination of places in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Local authorities have a central role to play in the planning and delivery of this objective, and partnerships with other providers are a major means of meeting pre-school place targets.

The research brief

Responsibility for the development, management and evaluation of pre-school education is devolved to local authorities within a policy framework set by The Scottish Office. Authorities can decide whether or not to partner private and voluntary sector providers, and also control the extent to which pre-school services are delivered by local authority nurseries and pre-school centres. This is the policy context in which this review is located. It sought to build a picture of the progress being made by authorities in the development of pre-school partnerships during November and December 1998 by identifying the perspectives of the various stakeholders – local authorities, pre-school providers and parents.

Specifically, the brief reviewed local authority partnership arrangements with the private and voluntary sectors across Scotland by:

- providing an overview of 'best value' considerations
- assessing quality assurance initiatives established by local authorities in support of places which they had commissioned from other sectors
- assessing how partnership policies might change following the announcements of a childcare strategy for Scotland and the extension of pre-school provision to three year olds
- making recommendations on how partnership might be enhanced, and on best practice for local authorities.

The methodology used to undertake the research comprised:

- telephone interviews with all 32 Scottish local authority education departments
- exploration in depth of the pre-school partnering arrangements in eight local authority areas
- telephone interviews with 55 pre-school providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors in the eight selected areas
- 300 telephone interviews with parents of children currently in their pre-school year within the eight areas
- discussions with members of five umbrella groups with an interest in children's issues.

The eight authorities were selected to provide a spread of urban and rural areas, and also a variety of partnership and non-partnership arrangements with private and voluntary sector providers. The eight areas were:

- Aberdeen
- Argyll and Bute
- Dundee
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Highland
- Perth and Kinross
- West Lothian.

Parents were interviewed during the evenings and at weekends to maximise the probability of their being at home.

Partnership arrangements, policies and provision

Partnership arrangements and policies

The major finding was the wide variety of existing partnership formats for the delivery of pre-school education. These range from full collaborative partnerships at one end to an absence of partnership at the other. In December 1998, the situation was as illustrated in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1: NATURE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY PARTNERSHIP WITH PRE-SCHOOL PROVIDERS

Type of partnership	**Local authorities**	
	Number	**Percentage**
Full partnership with private and voluntary sectors	22	68.8
Partnership with voluntary sector only	5	15.6
No partnership	5	15.6
Total	**32**	**100**

Most (22) local authorities were committed to full partnership with the voluntary and private sectors. However, with some authorities, variations in motivation and long-term commitment were evident, and for some the culture of collaboration was new and still being tested. Four local authorities viewed their current partnerships as pilots, put in place as a learning experience, which would not necessarily be continued in the future. Others recognised partnership as an expedient to ensure places for four year olds when their own provision was insufficient to meet the target. The inherent weaknesses in some partnerships may be resolved over time, as authorities come to recognise the benefits of collaboration and partnership in meeting the needs of parents and children.

Authorities were asked to identify their reasons for entering into partnership with private and voluntary pre-school providers. A variety of responses was given, focusing on 'best value', necessity and political factors (see Table 2 below). Two fundamental philosophies underpinned the reasons offered by local authorities:

TABLE 2: LOCAL AUTHORITY REASONS FOR ENTERING INTO PARTNERSHIP

	Local authorities	
	Number	**Percentage of responses**
Policy to work with other sectors	6	18
To provide full capacity	4	12
Isolation of communities[1]	5	15
To meet parental choice	18	54

[1] The 'isolation of communities' response was provided by respondents in predominantly rural areas. One of them stated: 'We have to respond to local conditions; if there is a good voluntary sector provider already in place, it's much better for us to work with them and train them, rather than try to set up our own from scratch.'

Two fundamental philosophies underpinned the reasons offered by local authorities:

- quality of pre-school and childcare services
- choice for parents.

Those who did not work in full partnership cited the main reason as being the need to fill local authority capacity, which was also considered by many local authority respondents to be of higher quality. Other authorities considered parental choice to be a key objective, which necessitated the formation of partnerships with private and voluntary pre-school providers to offer parents a range of provision.

Funding arrangements, levels of grant and use of retained funds

How did the local authorities fund partnership with pre-school providers? We discovered that most areas funded pre-school provision in the private and voluntary sectors at the Scottish Office recommended minimum figure of £850, although 25 per cent of authorities grant-funded at higher levels. Authorities reported spending retained funds on quality assurance and staff development activities, as well as administration (see Table 3 below).

TABLE 3: USE MADE BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES OF RETAINED FUNDS

	Local authorities	
	Number	**Percentage**
Quality assurance	22	68.6
Staff development activities	21	65.7
Administration	15	46.9
Capital purchase	2	6.3

Support for partners

What support did local authorities provide to partners? It is evident from our study that partnership arrangements with the private and voluntary sectors were often supported by collaborative training and quality assurance initiatives, which were largely viewed positively by private and voluntary providers (see Table 4 below).

TABLE 4: LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR PARTNERS ACROSS SECTORS

	Local authorities	
	Number	**Percentage**
Staff development and training sessions	14	43.7
Development and planning meetings with providers	5	15.6
Development officer visiting local providers	8	25
Using outside quality assurance provider	2	6.3
Development of own quality assurance framework	3	9.4

Some local authorities believed that the quality standards of the public sector were superior to the quality assurance standards within the private sector. This was a cause of contention in some areas and between some providers.

Early Years Forums and Childcare Partnerships

Most of the local authority Childcare Partnerships have been formed recently, in

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line with Scottish Office recommendations. Some are governed by well-prepared and participative policy frameworks but some have none. Only 11 authorities had published their partnership policy by December 1998.

TABLE 5: DATE CHILDCARE PARTNERSHIP ESTABLISHED

	Local authorities	
	Number	**Percentage**
1996	1	3.2
1997	8	25
1998	12	37.5
Partnership arrangements currently being devised	3	9.3
No formal partnership policy/no partnership	8	25

Early Years Forums have been set up by authorities to examine childcare issues for children up to 14 years of age. Authorities reported that the Childcare Partnerships have considerable empathy with Early Years Forums, and the constitution of groups may be similar.

Parental choice

Parents' experiences

Parents in our research sample who had had children at pre-school for over two years had predominantly used private sector provision. With the withdrawal of the voucher system, the rate of uptake of private pre-school education fell by approximately half in the last year. There was anecdotal evidence that parents perceive local authority nurseries to be educationally focused, whilst associating voluntary and private nurseries with childcare.

Parental choice

As reported, many local authorities appear ambivalent about partnership. Eighteen highlighted the importance of parental choice but 23 authorities encouraged parents to use local authority provision.

TABLE 6: REASONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY CONSTRAINTS ON PARENTAL CHOICE

	Local authorities	
	Number	**Percentage**
Use existing local authority provision where capacity allows	23	63.9
Assess parental requirements for full day care	6	16.7
Require parents to use provision in local authority area (no cross-bordering arrangements)	1	2.8
None – parental choice is key 'best value' objective	6	16.7

Cross-border provision

Local authorities attitudes towards cross-bordering (i.e. paying for pre-school places in another local authority area) also varies as shown in Table 7 below.

TABLE 7: LOCAL AUTHORITY POLICY ON CROSS-BORDERING PROVISION

	Local authorities	
	Number	**Percentage**
Open and active cross-bordering arrangements across sectors	13	40.6
Open and active cross-bordering arrangements with public sector only	12	37.5
Cross-bordering arrangements not an issue due to location	6	18.7
Prioritise own area to maximise income	1	3.2

Some parents and providers were concerned about disparities between authorities operating different policies, levels of funding of places and often not supporting cross-bordering. A number of respondents felt The Scottish Office should provide more assertive policy guidance on cross-bordering to assure an equitable approach across Scotland.

Timing and availability of pre-school education sessions

The objective of supporting parents by encouraging the development of wrap-around provision had some way to go before being achieved. The majority of providers offering full-day childcare and educational provision (from 8.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m.) were concentrated in the private sector (14 out of 26 in the sample). Only two out of 14 respondents in the voluntary sector, and two out of 25 in the public sector, provide all-day care. The main reasons for providers not providing all-day cover are listed in Table 8 below.

TABLE 8: FREQUENCY OF REASONS FOR NOT PROVIDING ALL-DAY COVER

Frequency	**Reason**
1	Lack of resources
2	Perceived legal and financial restrictions
3	Restricted by location
4	Lack of demand

Factors influencing parental choice

The research identified the factors which influence parents when selecting pre-school providers. The results are listed in Table 9 below.

It is clear that parents placed emphasis on factors such as the 'style of education and care', 'reputation', 'staff:child ratio' and 'proximity to home/work' in selecting a nursery for their children. This illustrates the importance that parents place on choosing a suitable environment for the child. As one parent explained:

> *I have altered my own work pattern to ensure that my daughter gets the right pre-school opportunities for her.*

There are, however, considerable variations in the importance given to factors by parents in different geographical areas.

TABLE 9: RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' CHOICE OF PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION (1=LOW RATING, 5=HIGH)

Area	Near home	Near work	Reputation	Style of care	Cost	Staff: child ratio	Garden	Attached to school
Aberdeen	3.73	2.25	4.33	4.15	2.43	2.47	2.63	2.96
Argyll & Bute	3.84	3.11	4.78	4.89	2.73	4.47	2.63	3.89
Dundee	4.53	2.21	4.46	4.39	3.21	3.28	4.46	3.25
Edinburgh	4.08	2.58	4.58	4.69	3.26	4.01	3.78	3.11
Glasgow	4.51	2.31	4.51	4.60	3.51	3.85	3.11	2.66
Highland	4.54	2.54	4.45	4.41	3.04	3.91	3.87	3.38
Perth & Kinross	3.31	4.80	2.59	4.34	2.72	4.09	3.59	3.38
West Lothian	4.32	2.27	4.68	5.00	3.09	4.68	4.09	4.00

Quality, 'best value' and staffing

In line with The Scottish Office's 'best value' policy, local authorities must demonstrate that they are offering services of the highest quality at an acceptable cost. We discovered that 'best value' policies and criteria are beginning to have their place within local authority decision making about pre-school education, with seven authorities reporting that pre-school education will be subject to 'best value' submissions. A further 22 authorities reported that cost, quality and choice indicators were already applied, or that they were considering 'best value' implications for the service.

Quality standards and initiatives

All pre-school providers interviewed operated to at least one quality assurance standard. However, the standard used varied across sectors. All are subject to visits by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. For most of the public sector providers interviewed, this was the only quality standard offered. Private and voluntary sector providers in our sample used a number of quality standards including:

- the Scottish Independent Nurseries Association's Quality Assurance Standard
- The Scottish Pre-school Play Association's standard
- Investors in People.

Concern was expressed by some partner-providers – mainly private sector – that their current quality standards were not perceived as sufficient by local authorities, in spite of being independently validated by other educational bodies. However, most private and voluntary sector respondents accepted that, in order to access pre-school funding, the local authorities' standards and requirements would have to be met. We felt that local authorities might not be sufficiently familiar with the standards applied in the voluntary and private sectors and therefore tended to underrate them.

Staffing

A sample of pre-school providers were interviewed to ascertain the skills and qualifications of staff within the different sectors. The main findings are shown in Table 10 below:

TABLE 10: QUALIFIED STAFFING IN PRE-SCHOOL PROVIDERS BY SECTOR

	Employee qualifications by frequency of response			
Sector	**First**	**Second**	**Third**	**Other**
Public	Qualified teachers	Nursery nurses	Volunteers	College placements
Private	Nursery nurses	Qualified teachers	Auxiliaries	Volunteers
Voluntary	Nursery nurses	Auxiliaries	Volunteers	Qualified teachers

A key concern cited by those local authorities not operating in partnership was that pre-school provision required a formal educational input, and that providers outwith the public sector might not have the experience required to meet educational, as opposed to childcare, needs. Many providers, even if they did not directly employ teaching staff, benefited from participation in a pre-school network that had access to qualified teachers. Most of these networks are organised by the local authority with the aim of providing support and encouraging development of standards. However, the extent and nature of the input was variable.

Communications and information issues

Communication between local authorities and partner providers is implied in the concept of partnership, and certainly it was reported to be satisfactory by most providers. The main methods used were written communication, meetings and seminars. Communications between local authorities and parents were undertaken by a variety of means, with open meetings, leaflets and surveys being used, although less proactive mechanisms, such as advertising, were also employed. Three authorities, at December 1998, had advice lines in place.

Although there was strong awareness of The Scottish Office's commitment to pre-school education, levels of recall about receiving specific publicity varied greatly between parents in the eight selected local authority areas (from 26 per cent to 74 per cent). This suggests that supplementary communication mechanisms should be employed to convey messages locally. Most parents in our sample found the information they needed to make decisions about pre-school education for their children, although 20 per cent were only able to obtain information from their prospective nurseries and not from the local authority. Information from friends and family was still influential in helping parents select a suitable pre-school provider for their child.

Pre-school curriculum and parents' aspirations for their children

Were parents well informed ? From our telephone interviews we found that parental knowledge of the existence of the pre-school curriculum varied between 30 and 58 per cent of parents interviewed by area; we consider that these figures seem to be relatively low. There may be more opportunity to alert parents directly through their pre-school provider of the progress of both the child and the provider's adherence to the pre-school curriculum. The majority of parents, across areas and sectors, considered 'social development' to be a key objective of pre-school provision (251 respondents/87 per cent), with 'education' the second most cited factor (180 respondents/60 per cent). Only 35 respondents (12 per cent) cited 'childcare' as a primary function for their choice of provider. Many parents stated that they felt that formal educational indices (reading, writing and arithmetic) should not be the principal focus of pre-school education, but should be introduced as incidentals. As one parent put it:

> *Children will learn the Three Rs during their early years in primary school. I would rather my daughter feel at ease with her peer group and feel confident in learning through play at this age. Also, any difficulties that children would encounter with formal learning would certainly affect their confidence. I would rather see my daughter enjoy the adventure of learning, rather than feel she's not as capable as her classmates.*

These findings are reinforced by parents' responses to the question of what kind of skills they would like their child to have developed by the time they enter Primary One – see Table 11 below.

TABLE 11: PARENTS' ASPIRATIONS FOR SKILLS TO BE DEVELOPED PRIOR TO P1 ENTRY

Main skills	**Number providing this response**	**Proportion of total parental sample**
Social skills development	232	77.3%
Reading, writing, arithmetic	141	47.0%
Other skills suggested by parents:		
Self-discipline/concentration	36	12.0%
Creative skills	13	4.3%
Ability to write own name	42	14.0%

Perhaps reassuringly, the findings illustrate that parents' own expectations of a pre-school curriculum are echoed in the existing curriculum framework.

Conclusions and good practice

The main finding of the review is that the majority of pre-school places were provided in the public sector, regardless of the existence and nature of partnership policies and practice. However, some rural authorities had a high dependence upon voluntary and private sector providers, for example Argyll and Bute, the Western Isles. 'Parental choice' was seen as a key criterion by many authorities (56 per cent), although in practice they often guide parents towards public provision, either to fill local authority capacity or for perceived quality reasons.

Local authorities' motives for entering into partnerships were mixed; while many embraced the range of experience that providers from different sectors could bring, and the opportunity to offer parents choice through partnership provision, some viewed partnership as a short-term expedient to meet capacity needs. Ambivalence also exists in some authorities about validated quality standards operating currently in the private and voluntary sectors.

The majority of authorities have recognised that working in partnership will provide a relatively flexible solution for future provision, particularly in helping them meet the target of universal part-time provision for three year olds by 2002. The majority of local authorities, regardless of current partnership arrangements, anticipated working in partnership in the future to meet their capacity needs for three year olds.

Key conclusions for future provision for the ante-pre-school year can be drawn:

- the ability of authorities to plan and manage pre-school provision varies significantly
- the quality and nature of training activities undertaken by local authorities with partnership providers vary significantly; evaluation and information on training activities are not shared significantly between authorities
- the nature and scope of the curriculum require further definition and, importantly, dissemination to parents and providers
- documentation on good practice is not widely available to assist authorities develop their services and partnership practices.

There are, however, a number of authorities who currently demonstrate good practice measures in partnership in the delivery of pre-school education services within their areas. This research has identified a number of enhancements and practices which all authorities could introduce to implement further good practice in partnership, for example:

- more positive and proactive communication procedures with parents and providers should be adopted
- Childcare Partnership and Early Years Forum policy documentation should be summarised and disseminated to providers and parents
- more opportunities which might support working parents should be examined, including co-ordinating cross-bordering arrangements between authorities
- extension of training and development activities to private and voluntary sector providers produces benefits for all parties
- exchange of experience between local authorities, and a more open attitude to exchanging experience between individual authorities and their private and voluntary providers would be beneficial and would help to extend and develop partnership arrangements
- local authorities should communicate educational standards and objectives more effectively to providers, while taking cognisance of private and voluntary providers' quality standards.

Finally, we would argue that the importance of pre-school provision lies not only in the personal, educational and social development of the child, but in the contribution which it can make to full-day care, thus helping both working parents and parents wishing re-enter the labour market or access jobs or training. Although partnership practices vary throughout Scotland, there is a great willingness to find solutions to deliver these objectives. The Scottish Executive can play a proactive role in helping authorities to develop their skills and capabilities to work in partnership with the private and the voluntary sectors to ensure success in this policy area.

Part Three

Ways Forward?

Chapter Nine

Pre-school Education and Childcare

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Over the past two years, government policy has increasingly focused on meeting the needs of children and parents for properly co-ordinated early years' services. Recognising that many parents of pre-school children have employment or other commitments, the government has encouraged better linkages between pre-school education and childcare provision, so that parents and children have a choice of accessible and convenient services. A strong theme of current policy is the need to harness the contributions of the different sectors – public, private and voluntary – and to ensure, through joint planning and collaboration, that services respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of users.

Current policy acknowledges that parents' needs are very varied. Some parents of pre-school children may simply seek part-time pre-school education. Others will need additional childcare, for part or all of the day. Some may seek integrated education and childcare services in the one place; for others, it may be preferable to access pre-school education and childcare separately, perhaps using the services of a childminder or nanny for the latter. The government's central objective is to ensure there is a range of high quality services available to meet these varied needs. That aim is reflected in the on-going programme of research outlined in this chapter.

Background

The Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Childcare Strategy for Scotland* (Cm 3958, May 1998) set out the vision of good quality, affordable and accessible childcare in every neighbourhood for children from birth until the age of 14. In the document heralding the new Scottish Executive – *Partnership for Scotland: An Agreement for the First Scottish Parliament* – Scottish Ministers affirmed their commitment to the Childcare Strategy and to the continued expansion of pre-school education so that places for all three and four year olds would be available by 2002. The policy aims and objectives of the Scottish Executive are therefore fully in line with the strategy adopted by the UK Government since 1997.

As preceding chapters have made clear, good quality early years' services help children to develop socially and emotionally as well as intellectually (Mooney and Munton, Chapter 1). *The Curriculum Framework for Children 3–5*, published in June 1999 by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, explicitly links all aspects of children's learning and is already doing much to break down the outdated dichotomy between good quality education and good quality childcare in the early years. In Scotland, pre-school education and childcare are seen as complementary. Whilst the services may have different points of emphasis – early education will for example continue to give special emphasis to the observation of the individual child and the design of learning opportunities in light of these – there is a clear policy drive towards much closer alignment of the services, and for seamless provision for those who wish it.

The objectives for both childcare and pre-school education imply a rapid and substantial growth in services. Much of this expansion will be achieved through local authorities working in partnership with voluntary and private providers (as evaluated in Chapter 8).

Planning early years services

Local authorities have been given responsibility for planning pre-school education provision and for establishing Childcare Partnerships through which plans for education can be effectively combined with proposals for the expansion of childcare for children 0–14. The Scottish Office issued guidance in October 1998 to help inform this planning process and, in the light of the first round of submitted plans, the Scottish Executive intends to issue later this year follow-up guidance identifying good practice.

Quality

The Scottish Executive are committed to the expansion of high quality services for young children: quantity and quality go hand in hand. Various initiatives are underway to promote quality provision. These include:

- the development of a self-evaluation guide to quality standards for early education and childcare, for use by early years' centres in all sectors.
- a 'best practice initiative' allowing managers and practitioners to share good practice through a programme of conferences and other events organised by the Scottish Executive
- reform of the regulatory framework for early education and childcare: a consultation paper issued in March 1999 discussed options for improving the current system of regulation and making it more consistent
- work to develop an improved training and qualifications framework to help people enter, move within and make progress in the childcare sector. This is being pursued with the Scottish Qualifications Authority and with employer interests in the relevant National Training Organisations. This should help secure an adequate supply of staff with the requisite knowledge and skills
- a code of guidance for parents employing a nanny
- a voluntary code of practice for nanny employment agencies.

Care for very young children and wider family support

Children do not grow and learn in a vacuum: they develop within families and communities. Some families need extra support. A cross-departmental review of provision for young children (in which The Scottish Office participated) identified the benefits of co-ordinated services to families with young children.

In December 1998 The Scottish Office issued guidance to local authorities and health boards setting out the aims and objectives that Ministers wished to pursue in relation to families with very young children. The key aim is to promote social inclusion through a positive start in young children's lives, focusing on promoting the personal growth and development of the youngest children (from birth to three years of age) before they have the opportunity to participate in pre-school education. The initiative recognises that children develop within their families, and aims to provide community-based, family-focused resources, including high quality childcare and direct support to parents. Local authorities have been allocated additional resources to provide targeted support.

Current and future research

Given the rapid development in pre-school education and childcare (charted for us by Edith McDowall, DTZ Peida in Chapter 7), it will be necessary to secure information on a nationwide basis to inform policy making and the allocation of resources. Such information will be linked to monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies.

Parental demand for childcare

Research to survey parental demand for childcare is being undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research and will report in March 2000. A key aim will be to establish a baseline against which The Scottish Executive can assess, through subsequent biennial surveys, progress in implementing the Childcare Strategy. The research will examine factors that influence parents' current and potential childcare decisions, and in particular their ability and willingness to pay for childcare under different circumstances. The project will gather quantitative and some qualitative information on take-up and unmet needs in childcare for children aged under 15. It should also provide some general information about what parents perceive to be suitable childcare. This Scotland-wide research on supply and demand for childcare will complement information gathered at local level. Childcare Partnerships in each local authority area have been engaged in overseeing audits of existing childcare services and of potential demand for childcare. The Scottish Executive will examine these local audits to develop a national picture of provision against expressed demand for the service.

Scottish Household Survey

In addition to bespoke surveys of education and childcare, there are other avenues of research open to the government, for example, the Scottish Household Survey, which is currently scheduled to run for four years. It will provide information for each of the 32 local authority areas for the first two years, which will provide quarterly results that are representative of Scotland as a whole. The Survey includes a question on childcare and should demonstrate any general change or progress in childcare, which can be compared to findings from other research projects.

Workforce surveys

Quality provision requires trained and committed staff and Stephen *et al.* (Chapter 3) have explored how staff think about their practice. To support a training and qualifications strategy for early education and childcare, workforce surveys will provide data on numbers of staff and qualifications held and some information on recruitment and retention. The surveys will cover all forms of childcare (nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school care, childminding) other than care in the parental home (e.g. by a nanny). When complete, this work should help determine the direction of any future research into staffing, qualifications and continuing professional development.

All-day provision for three and four year olds

As indicated above, the quality of education and care is a key consideration. Given policy objectives and trends in provision, it is increasingly important to look at the quality of all-day provision for three and four year olds. Research has therefore been commissioned from Stirling University into children's experiences of different forms of all-day care. This will examine different approaches and identify the factors that make for successful provision. This research will not seek to compare the merits of full-time and part-time provision – Ministers believe that parents must decide for themselves what type of provision they need to use. It will however be of interest to parents who want to know what features of all-day care are most likely to lead to good outcomes for their child. This research straddles the pre-school education and childcare strategies and should provide useful insights to inform future policy.

The particular demands facing those providing pre-school education and childcare in rural areas have been touched on several times in this book. The Arkelton Centre for Rural Development Research at the University of Aberdeen has recently completed Sottish Office-commissioned research into pre-school educational provision in rural areas. It focused on the demand implications of the government's commitment to offer a pre-school place to every four year old, and the possible extension of this provision to three year olds. The researchers suggested a series of alternative provision scenarios for differing rural areas, and made recommendations for the most cost-effective organisational arrangements to meet the predicted demand for places, taking account of the relative educational quality implications of the alternatives.

Care of very young children

Both the Childcare Strategy and the initiative to expand support for families with very young children will lead to a growth in childcare for children under three. But there is relatively little research on input and output quality standards for the care of very young children. To underpin the development of guidelines in this area, the Scottish Executive has recently commissioned research on what constitutes good quality care of very young children. This will support the government's initiative to expand services for very young children by, for example, enabling the development of good practice case studies.

Future research

The review of current research undertaken by Mooney and Munton of the Thomas Coram Research Unit (Chapter 1) suggested a range of further research. Some of this is to fill gaps in initial knowledge, some as evaluation of the impact of policies. They note that:

- *very little work has been done on the extent to which parents choose to use unregistered care provision. Relatives are currently the largest single group of providers. How do registered and unregistered carers compare on quality of provision? What proportion of unregistered family members feel obliged to provide care? Would they provide the same service if parents had access to an affordable alternative?*
- *private providers operating several nurseries in different locations are getting more common. For reasons related to economies of scale, many of these new nurseries offer more than 50 places. More research is needed to investigate whether the size of a nursery compromises provision.*

- *childminders may be encouraged to form networks to deliver nursery education to meet the demand for early years' services. The ability of childminder networks to deliver good quality provision needs to be evaluated.*
- *training for early years' service providers can be delivered in different ways. For example, vocational in-service training is becoming more popular. Different approaches to training need to be evaluated both from the point of view of the trainees and the impact training regimes have on the quality of service provision.*
- *Childcare Partnerships are beginning to audit local childcare needs and existing provision. The impact of Partnership plans on childcare provision needs to be evaluated systematically. Evaluation should examine changes in both the quantity and quality of childcare provision in local areas.*
- *the impact of Partnership plans on specific user groups also needs systematic evaluation. Parents, especially lone parents, should find it progressively easier to find affordable childcare. If assumptions are correct, as suitable childcare becomes more readily available, so more parents with young children should be entering education, training and employment. Large-scale surveys and more detailed qualitative work should aim to establish the extent to which this is the case. Research of this nature would also need to consider how changes in provision have influenced childcare arrangements for different kinds of families.*
- *increased demand is likely to have an impact on the childcare workforce in terms of both pay and conditions of employment. Given the close association between quality of provision and staff qualifications, pay and turnover, the effects of expansion on the workforce should be monitored more closely.*
- *very little is known about the processes by which parents choose between childcare options. If Partnerships are to be successful in meeting parental demand, information on how choices are made would be invaluable.*
- *the development of childcare provision will depend on a combination of several government initiatives, from the New Deal to the extension of parental leave. From a policy perspective, it may make good sense*

> *to develop a research strategy to monitor the impact of different policy initiatives on the supply, demand and quality of early years' provision.*
>
> **Mooney and Munton, 1999**

Work in some of these areas is already underway; and other research initiatives are under consideration. Mooney and Munton's own suggestions will be taken into account in taking forward a research programme for pre-school education and childcare.

Conclusion

The government's view is that childcare and pre-school education are interlinked and should be planned together within a framework that ensures high quality service. This principle has been informed by recent research and will continue to inform the commissioning of future research

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Over the last three years there has been a vast change and a huge expansion of the pre-school service. The Scottish Executive's goal is to complete this process by extending the provision of high quality, part-time pre-school education to all three year olds (in the year before their pre-school year) by 2002. Parents of children in pre-school education (and also many parents with children of school age) require access to good quality childcare in order to have the freedom to access work or training opportunities. The Executive's goal for pre-school education will therefore only be realised if easily accessible, high quality childcare integrated with education provision is available.

[illegible] these policy developments, The Scottish Office Educational Research Unit established a research programme [illegible] aspects of pre-school education [illegible] this book reports their findings to date. The [illegible] include a review of research findings, staff development [illegible] those involved in delivering pre-school education, the [illegible] delivering pre-school education, the costs of delivering [illegible] partnerships between local authorities [illegible] parents/carers' perceptions of pre-school education [illegible] evaluation of the pre-school voucher initiative and [illegible] pre-school education. The final chapter [illegible] forward for the research programme [illegible] extended to include childcare provision.

This book provides invaluable insights into a [illegible] education and care of young children.

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